

The Hebrew Corner

Frequently throughout the book of Jeremiah, through his words to the prophet, God sets a line of demarcation. The line represents a point in time, before which a certain practice was commonly done in Judah, but after which a new approach was to be implemented by God. The first example of this is a time that Jeremiah was sent to Tophet to prophesy (Jeremiah 19:1-15):

“Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind: Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. And I will make this city

desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them. Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury. Thus will I do unto this place, saith the LORD, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet: And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods. Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD's house; and said to all the people, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words."

The practice of the people of Judah was to call the name of this place Tophet, or the valley of the son of Hinnom. In Hebrew, the valley of the son of Hinnom is gay ben-Hinnom (גַּי בֶּן-הַנְּחֹם, gay vehn-hihn-NOHM). In the B'rit Hadashah, the Greek name for this place is Gehenna, translated in the KJV as hell. Prior to this prophecy, this was the place in which idolatrous worship took place, the most egregious of which was the burning of children with fire, which God made it clear that he did not command this or even consider this.

The prophecy indicates the future judgment that would come upon Judah, and that Tophet would become a burial place for those who died in the judgment. The new name for this place would be the valley of slaughter, or in Hebrew, gay haharayga (גיא ההרגה, gay hah-hah-ray-GAH).

In the next passage, God tells Jeremiah to prophesy against the false prophets who claim to speak in his name (Jeremiah 23:25-40):

“I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD. And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and

his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD spoken? But since ye say, The burden of the LORD ; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD; Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.”

The Hebrew word translated as burden in this passage is massa (מַשָּׂא, mahs-SAH). The KJV translation here is misleading, and a better translation would be utterance or oracle. The passage has nothing to say about the carrying of a load, although the same Hebrew word is used in other contexts to indicate a load that is being carried. The prophets has been making statements that they would say were utterances of God, but were not. Now God was saying that he would forsake the people who the prophets were prophesying falsely to, and that every person's word would be his own oracle. This was to be the case in Judah from this point on, and marked a clear line of demarcation from what had taken place in the past.

On the next passage, God describes to Jeremiah a new way that he intends to interact with his people (Jeremiah 31:31-34):

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new

covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

This is the good news that would later be fulfilled by the giving of the Holy Spirit to mankind. The Israelites being led by Moses had the presence of God with them, but in the new covenant, the Spirit of God would enter a person, to lead him and guide him, and so that inwardly he would know right from wrong, and would know the will of God.

Finally, in the place of desolation that Judah had become, God tells Jeremiah that there would be hope for Judah, and that hope would be in the form of a man, a son of David (Jeremiah 33:10-16):

“Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the

house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.”

This is the promise of the coming of Yeshua, who would bring salvation to the world, through his righteous life, his sacrifice on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. The line of demarcation between the past incomplete way of atonement, a yearly sacrifice of animals to restore a relation to God, and a veil in the temple separating mankind from the presence of the Lord, contrasted with the new way in which one could, by forsaking sin, and trusting in the one who paid the penalty for sin, could be cleansed of sin, receive the Holy Spirit, and have an everlasting relationship with God. This is the new way, the new covenant. Thank you, Lord, for giving us this way of the abundant life, forever in your love.

I wish you a good month, and as I am again writing this on Saturday,

Shabbat Shalom to all.