

# They Will Bury the Dead in Topheth

## 7:29 to 8:3

**DIG:** What symbolic action was Jeremiah to demonstrate God's rejection of the people? How was Jerusalem defiled? What was the reason for the lament? What three sins had the people committed? Was child sacrifice new to Palestine? Why did ADONAI forbid it (Lev 18:21; Ex 13:13-16)? Why will YHVH rename the Valley of Ben Hinnom? How is this ironic? What event did Jeremiah predict for Topheth in the future? What horrible things did the prophet say would happen under the sun and the moon and all the stars of heaven? What disgrace will the priests, prophets and people of Zion face?

**REFLECT:** In what ways do parents hinder the religious growth of their children today? How will this affect the universal Church, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers (Ephesians 2:14)? What do you think of "consulting the stars"? How might God frustrate those who trust their daily horoscope?

**609/608 BC early in the reign of Jehoiakim**

As the culmination of the Temple Sermon (see Cb - **Jeremiah's Temple Sermon**) YHVH begins by telling Jeremiah to mourn. The first sign of mourning: **Cut off your hair and throw it away (7:29a)**. The word for **cut hair** (Hebrew: *nezer*) is the root for the word Nazirite. **Numbers 6:1-21** tells us that a Nazirite was not to **cut off** the **hair** until the vow was completed, then it was to be **cut off** and offered on the bronze altar. But, if during the time of the vow the Nazirite was defiled by touching a dead body, or by any other means, he was to **cut off** his **hair** and **throw it away** because it was no longer an acceptable sacrifice to be placed upon the altar. It had become **defiled**. The picture here is that Jerusalem had become like a **defiled** Nazirite, to be **cut off**, no longer qualifying as an offering to **God**. No longer the virgin dedicated to **ADONAI**. **Jeremiah** goes into greater depth about this in **Cz - Judah is Like a Broken Jar**.

The second sign of mourning: **Take up a lament on the barren heights, for ADONAI has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under wrath (7:29b)**. Earlier in **Jeremiah** we were told of **the barren heights (4:11)**, the tops of mountains with the trees cleared away as centers for idol worship. **The people of Judah** had committed **three specific sins**.

**First**, they had done evil in the eyes the LORD (7:30a). The children of Y'hudah, no longer acting like His children, brought His anger upon themselves by their spiritual adultery and by violating the Covenant with Moses at Sinai.

**Secondly**, they have set up their detestable idols in the Temple, the house that bears My Name and have defiled it (7:30b). The whole land had been defiled. They were actually practicing idol worship right in the Temple itself. In God's house nonetheless (2 Kings 16:10-18, 21:4-9; Ezekiel 8:6-18)! ADONAI cannot govern in a land that is ritually unclean and unusable. Living in such a land may make people exiles even if they never leave.

**Thirdly**, in 7:31a we learn that they had built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire to Molech (Second Kings 23:10; Second Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah 19:5, 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-21). The Valley of Ben Hinnom is GE BEN HINNOM in Hebrew. It is a valley on the west and south sides of Jerusalem. Sometimes it was just called the valley of GE HINNOM, without the BEN in the middle. This is the origin of the word GEHENNA found in the B'rit Chadashah, which is one of the Greek words for hell, the place of everlasting fire (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; Second Peter 2:4). What happened to the body in Topheth will ultimately happen to the body in the lake of fire for the unbeliever (see the commentary on Revelation Fp - The Lake of Fire is the Second Death). Sacrificing their children was something God did not command, nor did it enter His mind (7:31b). This was clearly a contradiction to God's command: You are not to let any of your children be sacrificed to Molech; thereby profaning the name of your God. I am ADONAI (Leviticus 18:21).

So beware, **the days are coming**, declares ADONAI, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room (7:32). **It will become the scene of their slaughter by the enemy**. When Jeremiah (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) uses the phrase **the days are coming; in those days, at that time; or for the time will surely come**, the context points either to the **near historical future** or the **far eschatological future**. The context determines which one should be used. This is the fifth of twenty-five times that Yirmeyahu uses one of **these phrases**.

In this case **the days are coming** points to the **near historical future** of the fall of Tziyon (see Gb - **The Fall of Jerusalem**) in 586 BC. Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away. **The Jews viewed such treatment of the corpse and the lack of proper burial with the utmost horror**. It was an unthinkable thing for someone to die without a proper burial (Psalm 79:3). **I will bring an end to the signs of normal life, to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the Land will become desolate (7:33-34)**. Marriages in the Near East are celebrated by processions of friends, who throng the streets and give noisy demonstrations of their joy. Singers and musicians accompany them, and the shouts of music are heard afar off.<sup>130</sup>

But **the prophet** prophesied that society would draw so close to total death that any such celebration would be impossible and unthinkable. Life would become barbaric in 586 BC when the Babylonians destroyed **Tziyon**. **Yirmeyahu** searches for the most extreme language to invite **his** listeners to embrace the chaos at hand.

**At that time**, declares **ADONAI**, **[these enemies]** will remove the bones of the kings of Y'hudah, the bones of his princes, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Yerushalayim from their graves. Nothing is sacred or honored or beyond reach of the wrath of **Ha'Shem** now unleashed. The punishment here fits the sin: **Judah** had gone after the gods of the heavens; now the bones of the disobedient dead would be spread before those very gods.<sup>131</sup> **They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped. Their bones will be exposed to the very signs they had worshiped.** This was astrology and occultism to the ultimate degree. **They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like dung lying on the ground (8:1-2 CJB).** This was a mark of extreme contempt.

**All the survivors of this evil family who remain wherever I have driven them will prefer death to life**, declares **ADONAI** of heaven's angelic armies (8:3 CJB). They had rejected **YHVH** and **His Word**, they had refused to **choose life** offered by **ADONAI** (**Deuteronomy 30:19-20**). Now **their life . . . a godless, joyless, hopeless life . . .** was a burden to them. In the end, **life** was worse than **death**. There would be no relief for the wicked among **them**. But it would be a different story for **the righteous of the TaNaKh**. In time, **Jeremiah himself** advised **the exiles** to **build houses** and raise families in **Babylon (29:4-7)**. **Ha'Shem's** warning was conditional (**18:7-8**). **Those** in captivity who accepted **their** plight turned back to **ADONAI** and did not succumb to despair. Consequently, **their** faith would reach its greatest heights during the Babylonian captivity.<sup>132</sup>