

the Lord directed (19:10-11). The nation would be smashed as easily and as utterly as the pottery was.

### JEREMIAH PERSECUTED

The subsequent story in chapter 20 tells how Pashur the chief overseer of the temple put Jeremiah into stocks (probably after a scourging) for preaching his message in the temple.

The next morning Jeremiah had a message from the Lord for Pashur (Read Jeremiah 20:1-6). The terrible fate of Pashur and his family is revealed. It was not the personal mistreatment of Jeremiah that brought about this personal doom, but the fact that Pashur had prophesied lies (verse 6).

### SOME LESSONS

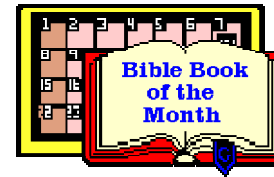
1. We see a powerful lesson on the sovereignty of God. Because He is **GOD** He can do as He wills. He has revealed His will to man and it is His right to set what conditions He wishes for man's salvation.
2. Man may think a situation is hopeless, but God in His mighty power can make a situation or event to be used for His purpose (Read 32:17-32).
3. Short term persecution may come (Revelation 2:10), but such a testing of man's faithfulness will not go without its retribution upon the evil doers. (cf. Jer. 20:3-6).

### SUPPLEMENT QUESTIONS:

1. What effective way of teaching is used by Jeremiah?
2. Why did Jeremiah go down to the potter's house?
3. What was Israel like in God's hand?
4. At the potter's house, what happened to the first vessel?
5. What is the lesson illustrated in the "Ruskin" story?
6. How can a nation be blessed? (Proverbs 14:34; 2 Chronicles 7:14)
7. How could this illustration (as any) be pushed too far?
8. Is prayer for the purpose of "getting our will done" or showing our acceptance that "Thy will be done"?
9. Does man determine his own destiny? Does he determine how he will get there?
10. What is the lesson of the broken vessel?
11. Is there a lesson for us in Jeremiah's persecution?

[Sources heavily used: James E. Smith, *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, 1972; and *Annual Lesson Commentary*, Gospel Advocate, 1964.]

# JEREMIAH – The Potter's Vessel



Lesson # 2

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-10

Collateral Reading: Jeremiah 18, 19, 20

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most successful ways of teaching the truth is by means of effective illustrations. There is no greater example of this in the Old Testament than in the ministry of Jeremiah. Our Lord is the New Testament example; He was a master teacher.

Jeremiah was sent to the house of the potter, not to preach a sermon, but to prepare one; not to speak the word of the Lord, but to hear it.

Jeremiah chapters 18, 19, and 20 all deal in some way with the theme of a potter and his vessels. First, there is "the marred vessel" (18:1-17) with the lesson of the potter's sovereignty over the clay. Then 18:18-23 which records the prayer of Jeremiah for vengeance upon those who were plotting against him could be called "the human vessel."

The breaking of a potter's vessel is used to symbolize God's judgment and wrath in chapters 19 and 20.

### Jeremiah 18:1-10

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand,

O house of Israel! 7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

*New King James Version*

## THE TEXT

**Verses 1-4.** Jeremiah is given instructions to go down to the house of the potter where God would reveal to him something of vital significance for the people. When he arrived the potter was at work on his wheel – two circular stone disks connected by a vertical shaft. The lower disk was worked by the foot, which in turn set in motion the upper disk upon which the potter worked the clay.

W.M. Thompson, in *The Land and the Book*, (1873, p. 520) gives a vivid description of the potter's work.

Taking a lump in his hand he placed it on the top of the wheel and smoothed it into a low cone; then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the center, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it enlarged and became thinner, he gave it whatever shape he pleased with the utmost ease and expedition.

As Jeremiah watched the potter at work he noticed that the emerging vessel developed some imperfection which displeased the eye of the maker. The potter rolled the clay into a lump again and reshaped it into a vessel that met with his approval.

It's not the point to tell what caused the ruin of that original vessel. The lesson here is that the clay is in the hands of the potter to do as he sees fit. When the vessel doesn't meet his approval he can cast it aside or create a new vessel out of the clay. The new vessel might be similar to the original vessel or it might be something entirely new. The Lord can make men or nations into what ever kind of vessel will serve his purpose.

There is an interesting story about John Ruskin calling on a literary collaborator who had ruined a costly handkerchief by a blot of ink. "Nothing can be done with it," he cried, "it's absolutely ruined." "Are you sure," Ruskin replied, "let me have it awhile." A short time later the handkerchief came back by mail. His friend hardly recognized it. Ruskin had skillfully used the ink blot as a basis for a beautiful design. The scarf was now many times more valuable than in its original condition. What we think are fatal blots upon life can often be made the foundation for a life of greater service for the Lord.

**Verses 5-10.** The Lord begins to explain the lesson to Jeremiah. The nation of Israel is but clay in the hands of the divine Potter. He can dispose of them as he wills. If the nation yields and submits to the working of the

divine hand, He will produce from it a beautiful and useful vessel. But if Israel refuses to allow the Potter to have his way then Israel will be discarded and God will start all over again.

[*Investigative Question:*] What does Proverbs 14:34 have to say along this line? Also read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

A word of caution is in order here. When an analogy is pressed beyond its intended purpose it can yield a bad understanding. We should not conclude from this illustration that in God's dealing with Israel He has been the one at fault. The potter Jeremiah was watching may have made the mistake or it may have been some imperfection in the clay itself. Clay is inanimate and material while the human heart possesses the power to willfully rebel against the Potter.

Man can choose to be pliable in the hands of the Creator or to be as hard as sun-baked clay. Every child of God should be praying: "Have Thine own way Lord, Have thine own way. Thou art the Potter, I am the clay."

[*Thought Question*] Does this principle deny that man has any involvement in his own destiny?

An important principle of Biblical interpretation comes out in vs. 7-10. Simply stated the principle is this, neither God's threats nor His promises are unconditional. The Lord's disposition toward people depends entirely on their responses to Him. He is the God of unchanging justice and mercy. He may decree the destruction of a nation yet if that nation repents of its sins God will spare it. The story of Jonah and Nineveh may have been one of the favorite topics of the preachers in Jeremiah's day. What a powerful illustration it was of God's demands and yet also of his mercy.

[*Thought Question*] What modern religious doctrine do these verses refute on the individual level?

## THE BROKEN VESSEL

"Thus says the Lord: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. 2 And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, ..." Jeremiah 19:1-2.

The Lord specified the place where Jeremiah was to preach this lesson. The valley of Hinnom was the site of human sacrifices, a symbol of Jerusalem's worse shame. This strange procession— Jeremiah and his earthen jar leading a group of priests and civil authorities— must have attracted a curious crowd of onlookers.

Jeremiah delivered a scathing message and then shattered the vessel as