

Jeremiah 18-20: Pliable or Hard?
18:1-10, Visit to the Potter
February 24, 1990
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A. Overview

1. Recall overall structure of the book: alternation of biography and oracle.
 - a) Biographical, 1. Jeremiah and the **Lord**.
 - b) Oracles, 2-25. Judgment on Judah.
 - c) Biographical, 26-29. Jeremiah's relations with the **Priests**.
 - d) Oracles, 30-31. Promise of Restoration; New Covenant.
 - e) Biographical, 32-45. Jeremiah's relations with the **King**.
 - f) Oracles, 46-51. Oracles against the Nations.
 - g) Historical Epilog: 52 = 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. According to 51:64, this is not part of the main body of the book.

2. Focus in on the development of 2-25. A series of extended sections, up to 4 chapters each, divided by third person IF's.
 - a) 2 establishes the **sin** of Judah, through the *rib*.
 - b) 3-6 emphasizes the **judgment** that must result.
 - c) 7-10 brings in the theme of **mourning**.
 - d) 11-13 promises **restoration**, and introduces several themes that are picked up in the following chapters:

	14-17	18-20	21-24
1) Restoration	X		X
2) Covenant	X		
3) King's role	X		X
4) Object Lessons		X	X
5) Jer's Laments	X	X	

- 1) 14-17: The people have violated the covenant, and are under its judgments. Yet, if they will return to its provisions, pardon is still possible.

- 2) 18-20: But this opportunity for return will not last forever. If they harden their hearts, they can only be broken.

- 3) 21-24: The king has a special responsibility for leading his people in righteousness.

- 4) 25: The judgment falls.

3. Structure of 18-20
 An alternation of three levels.
 - a) Object lessons of pottery.
 - 1) 18:1-10, Making a Pot: God can work with people as a potter does with clay.
 - 2) 19:1-13 Breaking a pot: There comes a time when a pot has hardened, and then there is no more room for molding it. If

it proves unsatisfactory, one can only destroy it.

- b) The people reject the Lord and his Messenger
The second episode is much more personal than the first.
 - 1) 18:11-18, the people reject the Lord and then his messenger.
 - 2) 19:14-20:6 The Pashur Episode
- c) Jeremiah's laments
 - 1) 18:19-23 Jer. asks the Lord to judge his enemies.
 - 2) 20:7-18 Jer. complains to the Lord

B. 18:1-10. The Potter

The Lord first shows Jer a potter at work, and then draws an object lesson from his example.

1. 1-2, The Command

God sends Jer. to the potter's house to receive a revelation. Note that the command includes the promise of the interpretation

Application: Do we sometimes think it's hard to hear God speak? Not even the prophets, who heard the word of the Lord directly, always had it easy. The condition for Jer. to hear the word of the Lord was to go visit the potter. For us, it may be "Get up in the morning and read your Bible."

2. 3-4, Jer. sees the potter remake a marred vessel.

- a) "Wheels": the double potter's wheel. The lower is a stone flywheel turned with the feet. The upper is a wooden platform on which the pot is formed. Spins quite fast.
- b) "The vessel was marred." It got too thin, or too tall, or the wrong shape.
- c) "He made it again another vessel." Because the clay is pliable, he can bend it where he wants it, and even lump it up and start over. Cf. Rom. 9:21: "Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor," one a beautiful vase for flowers, the other a pail for garbage. Read Paul carefully; he's not speaking of separate lumps of clay, but of one and the same lump.

3. 5-10, God tells Jer. that he is a potter working with men and nations. The development here is by way of a summary statement that is then amplified,

- a) Statement. Begins with a rhetorical question that expects a positive answer, and establishes two correspondences: the Lord is like a potter, and the people is like clay.
 - 1) Fitting image--recall Gen. 2, where God forms man from the dust of the earth, like a potter!

2) God as the sovereign creator--Isa. 29:16; 45:9; Rom. 9. We have no basis to complain of what he has done to us.

b) Amplification: God is able to respond quickly to people, as they respond to him. NB: These pp.s are not conditions, but sequences; not general rules, but examples. The point is not that God's promises are conditional, but that he interacts with man, as the potter does with the clay, in order to accomplish his sovereign purpose. Each of the two sides of the contrast proceeds through three stages.

1) God's word of judgment or blessing. The verbs in 7 and 9 are from 1:10, in the same order.

- a> "Pluck up:" uproot a plant. Opposite of "plant" in 9.
- b> "Pull down:" tear down a building. Opposite of "build" in 9.
- c> "Destroy."

2) The people's response: repent in the face of announced judgment, or do evil in order not to have to listen to the Lord.

3) In both cases, the Lord will retract his previously announced designs. "Repent" is misleading; it's not the word used to describe human repentance. Cf. "another vessel," v.4. It doesn't come out looking like what it did at the beginning.

4) *Application*: We must not presume on God's purposes of blessing toward us, or despair of his promises of judgment. He does not wind the world up and let it go. Like a potter working with a clay pot, he is constantly pushing, pinching, watching how the clay responds to his actions and in turn taking the next appropriate action.

Theological note: Note how the same image emphasizes two ideas that at first seem to be mutually contradictory: God's sovereignty over us, and his ability apparently to change our destiny in the midst of our lives. This is the crux of the great mystery of God's sovereignty--how it can coexist with our responsible and causative actions. Can't understand it, but both are true. This is why we speak, not of eternal security, but of the perseverance of the saints. The saved are those who die saved. Those who turn away and reject God, however intense their initial faith may seem to have been, are like a pot that started out for a vase and ended up a garbage pail.

C. 18:11-18. Rejection

The people reject the Lord and then his messenger. This section has the form of an interchange between the Lord and the people.

1. 11. Based on the illustration of the potter, YHWH announces

coming judgment, and begs the people to repent.

- a) "I frame evil against you." "Frame" is a participle, the same word that means "potter." "Right now, I'm shaping you in the direction of a vessel for dishonor."
- b) On the basis of vv. 7-8, turn before it's too late. Note that though 7 speaks of nations and peoples, 11 requires individual response, "every one." We as a nation have tried too long to do good corporately, through our congress, and avoid our individual responsibility. The faith of the nation is no better than the faith of those in it.

2. 12. The people defiantly reject the Lord's offer of reform.

- a) "There is no hope" cf. 2:25--for them? or for God ("Don't waste your breath")? Both are sinful attitudes. One, in a false show of humility, denies the truth of God's offer of salvation; the other is more directly rebellious and wilful.
- b) They insist on following their own plans and imaginations. "Doing one's own thing" isn't at all new. That's exactly the philosophy that these folk advocate.

3. 13-17. Because their sin is so wilful, the Lord promises a triple rejection.

a) The sin is described in a way that recalls 2:10-13.

- 1) 13, cf. 2:10. It is unprecedented among the Gentiles. Cf. Rom. 2; 1 Cor. 5. When the lives of God's people are worse than those of unbelievers, we have a real problem.

Application: The worst reproach one can imagine for a child of God is to compare unfavorably with unbelievers in matters of morality. Unbelievers may slander us out of hatred, but our conduct must be such as to put these false accusations to shame, 1 Pet. 3:16.

- 2) 15a, cf. 2:11. They have forgotten the Lord and gone off after false gods, here called "vanity."
- 3) 14, cf. 2:13. This is like leaving fresh, cool water, so rare and valuable in the arid Middle East.

b) As a result of this sin, they will suffer a triple judgment--from their idols, other people, and the Lord himself.

- 1) What the idols do: Lead them a frustrating, painful life. Idioms from the vocabulary of roads:
 - a> cause them to stumble;
 - b> not "ancient paths," but "endless paths"--like our Boy Scout 10 mile hike

- c> "a way not cast up," ungraded, with unfilled potholes.
- 2) What other people do: shake their heads and whistle in amazement at the Lord's judgment.
 - 3) What the Lord does: scatter them like leaves blown before the storm wind. This is the Scirocco, the hot wind from the desert. And if they should seek him at that point, his back will be turned to them.
4. 18. The people turn their rejection against the messenger, Jeremiah. Note the alternation of *l:kw.*, plot against Jer., and denial of his message.
- a) They believe that their religious institutions (priest, wise man, and prophet) are sound, and that Jer. is just a fanatic whom they can safely ignore.
 - b) But they can't get him out from under their skin, so they plan to slander him, and thus to get him condemned to death, cf. v.23.
 - c) *Application:* John 15:20, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If men reject the Lord and we stand for him, they will reject us too. Don't be surprised at this when it happens.

Psalm 22a, recalling the rejection of the Lord Jesus and his trust in God.

Analysis

- A. 18:1-10, Making a Pot: execution p. God can work with people as a potter does with clay.
1. command and summary: quote p: God sends Jer. to the potter's house to receive a revelation. *Note that the command includes the promise of the interpretation*
 - a) quote f: 18:1 HA/D.FBFR):A\$ER HFYFH)EL-YIR:M:YFHW. M"/)"T Y:HWFH L"/)MOR
 - b) quote: motivation p
 - 1) command: imperative seq q
 - a> 2 QW.M
 - b> W:/YFRAD:T.F B."YT HA/Y.OWC"R
 - 2) motive: W:/\$FM.FH)A\$:MIY(/:AKF)ET-D.:BFRFY
 2. execution: interpretation p
 - a) text: awareness quote p: Jer. sees the potter remake a marred vessel.
 - 1) AQ f: 3 WF/)"R"D B."YT HA/Y.OWC"R
 - 2) awareness quote: narr. seq. p {W:/HIN./"HW.} [W:/HIN."H]-a> [HW.]) (O&EH M:LF)KFH (AL-HF/)FB:NFYIM
 - b> 4 W:/NI\$:XAT HA/K.:LIY):A\$ER HW.) (O&EH B.A/XOMER B.:/YAD HA/Y.OWC"R

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c> W:/$FB
d> manner p
  1> text: WA/Y.A(:A&/"HW. K.:LIY )AX"R
  2> manner: K.A/):A$ER YF$AR B.:/("YN"Y HA/Y.OWC"R
      LA/(:A&OWT P

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b) explanation: quote p: God tells Jer. that he is a potter working with men and nations.

1) quote f: 5 WA/Y:HIY D:BAR-Y:HWFH)"L/AY L"/)MOWR

2) quote: amplification p

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a> text
  1> 6 H:A/KA/Y.OWC"R HA/Z.EH LO)-)W.KAL LA/(:A&OWT
      L/FKEM B."YT YI&:RF)"L N:)UM-Y:HWFH
  2> HIN."H KA/XOMER B.:/YAD HA/Y.OWC"R K."N-)AT.EM
      B.:/YFD/IY B."YT YI&:RF)"L S

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b> amplification: contrast p. God is able to respond quickly to people, as they respond to him. NB: These pp.s are not conditions, but sequences; not general rules, but examples. The point is not that God's promises are conditional, but that he interacts with man, as the potter does with the clay, in order to accomplish his sovereign purpose.

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1> text: prophetic seq. p 7 REGA( "suddenly"
  a: ):ADAB."R (AL-G.OWY W:/(AL-MAM:LFKFH LI/N:TOW$
      W:/LI/N:TOWC W./L:/HA):ABIYD
  b: 8 W:/$FB HA/G.OWY HA/HW.) M"/RF(FT/OW ):A$ER
      D.IB.AR:T.IY (FLFY/W
  c: W:/NIXAM:T.IY (AL-HF/RF(FH ):A$ER XF$AB:T.IY
      LA/(:A&OWT L/OW S

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2> contrast: prophetic seq. p. 9 W:/REGA( "suddenly"
  a: ):ADAB."R (AL-G.OWY W:/(AL-MAM:LFKFH LI/B:NOT
      W:/LI/N:+O(A
  b: 10 W:/(F&FH {HF/RF(FH} [HF/RA(] B.:/("YN/AY
      L:/BIL:T.IY $:MO(A B.:/QOWL/IY
  c: W:/NIXAM:T.IY (AL-HA/+.OWBFH ):A$ER )FMAR:T.IY
      L:/H"Y+IYB )OWT/OW S

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B. 18:11-18, interchange p, the people reject the Lord and then his messenger.

1. YHWH: quote p: Based on the illustration of the potter, YHWH announces coming judgment, and begs the people to repent.

a) quote f: 11 W:/(AT.FH):EMFR-NF))EL-)IY\$-Y:HW.DFH
W:/(AL-YOW\$:B"Y Y:RW.\$FLAIM L"/)MOR

b) quote: quote p

1) quote f: K.OH)FMAR Y:HWFH

2) quote: motive p

a> motive: HIN."H)FNOKIY YOWC"R (:AL"Y/KEM RF(FH W:/XO\$"B

- (:AL"Y/KEM MAX:A\$FBFH
b> command:
1> \$W.BW. NF))IY\$ MI/D.AR:K./OW HF/RF(FH
2> W:/H"Y+IYBW. DAR:K"Y/KEM W./MA(AL:L"Y/KEM
2. People: quote p: They defiantly reject the Lord's offer of reform
a) quote f: 12 W:/)FM:RW.
b) quote: reason p
1) text: NOW)F\$ "there is no hope" cf. 2:25--for them? or for God ("Don't waste your breath")?
2) reason: coordinate p
a> K.IY-)AX:AR"Y MAX:\$:BOWT"Y/NW. N"L"K:
b> W:/)IY\$ \$:RIRW.T LIB./OW-HF/RF(NA(:A&EH S
3. YHWH: quote p: Because their sin is so wilful, the Lord promises a triple rejection.
a) quote f: 13 LF/K"N K.OH)FMAR Y:HWFH
b) quote: result p
1) text: ampl. p: The people have sinned in an unexpected and unprecedented way.
a> text: awareness p
1> quote f:
a: \$A):ALW.-NF) B.A/G.OWYIM
b: MIY \$FMA(K.F/)"L.EH
2> quote: \$A(:ARURIT (F&:TFH M:)OD B.:TW.LAT YI&:RF)"L
b> ampl: contrast p
1> text:
a: 14 H:A/YA(:AZOB MI/C.W.R &FDAY \$ELEG L:BFNOWN
b:)IM-YIN.FT:\$W. MAYIM ZFRIYM QFRIYM NOWZ:LIYM
2> contrast:
a: 15 K.IY-\$:K"XU/NIY (AM./IY
b: LA/\$.FW:) Y:QA+."RW.
2) result: The idols, other people, and the Lord himself will punish them for their sin.
a> What the idols do: WA/Y.AK:\$ILW./M B.:/DAR:K"Y/HEM
\$:BIYL"Y (OWLFM LF/LEKET N:TIYBOWT D.EREK: LO) S:LW.LFH
b> What other people do: 16 LF/&W.M)AR:C/FM L:/SAM.FH
{\$:RW.QAT} [{\$:RIYQOWT] (OWLFM K.OL (OWB"R (FLEY/HF
YI\$.OM W:/YFNIYD B.:/RO)\$/OW
c> What the Lord does:
1> 17 K.:/RW.XA-QFDIYM):APIYC/"M LI/P:N"Y)OWY"B
2> (OREP W:/LO)-PFNIYM)ER:)/"M B.:/YOWM)"YD/FM S
4. People: quote p: They turn their rejection against the messenger, Jeremiah.
a) quote f: 18 WA/Y.O)M:RW.
b) quote:
1) L:KW.
2) W:/NAX:\$:BFH (AL-YIR:M:YFHW. MAX:A\$FBOWT
3) K.IY LO)-TO)BAD T.OWRFH MI/K.OH"N W:/("CFH M"/XFKFM W:/DFBFR
MI/N.FBIY)
4) L:KW.
5) W:/NAK./"HW. BA/L.F\$OWN

6) W: /)AL-NAQ:\$IYBFH)EL-K.FL-D.:BFRFY/W