

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The type of the potter's vessel, and its signification, Jeremiah 18:1-10. The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem exhorted to repentance, Jeremiah 18:11; but on their refusal, (which is represented to be as unnatural as if a man should prefer the snowy Lebanon or barren rock to a fruitful plain, or other waters to the cool stream of the fountain), their destruction is predicted, Jeremiah 18:12-17. In consequence of these plain reproofs and warnings of Jeremiah, a conspiracy is formed against him, Jeremiah 18:18. This leads him to appeal to God for his integrity, Jeremiah 18:19, Jeremiah 18:20; who puts a most dreadful curse in the mouth of his prophet, strongly indicative of the terrible fate of his enemies, Jeremiah 18:21-23.

Verse 1

The word which came to Jeremiah - This discourse is supposed to have been delivered some time in the reign of Jehoiakim, probably within the first three years.

Verse 2

Go down to the potter's house - By this similitude God shows the absolute state of dependence on himself in which he has placed mankind. They are as clay in the hands of the potter; and in reference to every thing here below, he can shape their destinies as he pleases. Again; though while under the providential care of God they may go morally astray, and pervert themselves, yet they can be reclaimed by the almighty and all-wise Operator, and become such vessels as seemeth good for him to make. In considering this parable we must take heed that in running parallels we do not destroy the free agency of man, nor disgrace the goodness and supremacy of God.

Verse 3

He wrought a work on the wheels - *וְעָבַד עָלֵיהֶם* (al haabnayim), upon the stones, the potter's wheel being usually made of such, the spindle of the moving stone being placed on a stone below, on which it turned, and supported the stone above, on which the vessel was manufactured, and which alone had a rotatory motion. The potter's wheel in the present day seems to differ very little from that which was in use between two and three thousand years ago.

Verse 4

The vessel - was marred in the hands of the potter - It did not stand in the working; it got out of shape; or some gravel or small stone having been incorporated with the mass of clay, made a breach in that part where it was found, so that the potter was obliged to knead up the clay afresh, place it on the wheel, and form it anew; and then it was such a vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Verse 6

Cannot I do with you as this potter? - Have I not a right to do with a people whom I have created as reason and justice may require? If they do not answer my intentions, may I not reject and destroy them; and act as this potter, make a new vessel out of that which at first did not succeed in his hands?

It is generally supposed that St. Paul has made a very different use of this similitude from that mentioned above. See Romans 9:20, etc. His words are, *“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”* To this every sensible and pious man will answer, Undoubtedly he has. But would any potter make an exceedingly fair and good vessel on purpose to dash it to pieces when he had done? Surely no! And would or could, the God of infinite perfection and love make millions of immortal souls on purpose for eternal perdition, as the horrible decree of reprobation states? No! This is a lie against all the attributes of God. But does not the text state that he can, out of the same lump, the same mass of human nature, make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor? Yes. But the text does not say, what the horrible decree says, that he makes one part, and indeed the greater, for eternal perdition. But what then is the meaning of the text? Why evidently this: As out of the same mass of clay a potter may make a flagon for the table and a certain utensil for the chamber, the one for a more honorable, the other for a less honorable use, though both equally necessary to the owner; so God, out of the same flesh and blood, may make the tiller of the field and the prophet of the Most High; the one in a more honorable, the other in a less honorable employ; yet both equally necessary in the world, and equally capable of bringing glory to God in their respective places. But if the vessel be marred in his hand, under his providential and gracious dealings, he may reject it as he did the Jews, and make another vessel, such as he is pleased with, of the Gentiles; yet even these marred vessels, the reprobate Jews, are not finally rejected; for all Israel shall be saved in (through) the Lord, i.e., Jesus Christ. And should the Gentiles act as the Jews have done, then they also shall be cut off, and God will call his Church by another name. See on Romans 9:22 (note) and below.

#### Verses 7-10

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, etc. - If that nation, against whom, etc. - And at what instant, etc. - If it do evil, etc. - These verses contain what may be called God's decree by which the whole of his conduct towards man is regulated. If he purpose destruction against an offending person, if that person repent and turn to God, he shall live and not die. If he purpose peace and salvation to him that walketh uprightly, if he turn from God to the world and sin, he shall die and not live.

#### Verse 12

There is no hope - See Jeremiah 2:25.

#### Verse 13

The virgin of Israel - Instead of יִשְׂרָאֵל (Yisrael), three of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., with the Alexandrian copy of the Septuagint, have יְרוּשָׁלַיִם (Yerushalem), Jerusalem.

#### Verse 14

Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon - Lebanon was the highest mountain in Judea. Would any man in his senses abandon a farm that was always watered by the melted snows of Lebanon, and take a barren rock in its place? How stupid therefore and absurd are my people, who abandon the everlasting God for the worship of idols!

#### Verse 16

A perpetual hissing - שִׁחִיחָה (sherikoth). a shrieking, hissing; an expression of contempt.

#### Verse 17

I will scatter them as with an east wind - It is the property of this wind, almost every where, to parch up, blast, and destroy grain and trees, and even cattle and men suffer from it. Hence the old metrical proverb: - "When the wind blows from the east, 'Tis good for neither man nor beast."

#### Verse 18

Come, and let us devise devices - Let us form a conspiracy against him, accuse him of being a false prophet, and a contradicter of the words of God, for God has promised us protection, and he says we shall be destroyed, and that God will forsake his people.

Let us smite him with the tongue - On the tongue; so it should be rendered. Lying and false testimony are punished in the eastern countries, to the present day, by smiting the person on the mouth with a strong piece of leather like the sole of a shoe. Sometimes a bodkin is run through the tongue. Blasphemy, calumny, and cursing of parents, are usually punished in that way among the Chinese.

#### Verse 20

They have digged a pit for my soul - For my life; this they wish to take away.

Stood before thee to speak good for them - I was their continual intercessor.

#### Verse 21

Therefore deliver up their children - The execrations in these verses should be considered as simply prophetic declarations of the judgments which God was about to pour out on them.

If we consider them in their grammatical meaning, then they are not directions to us to whom our Lawgiver has said, "Love your enemies."