

Jeremiah 18:1-11

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9 And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11 Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

It is very important for God to get the word to the people. God's people have to know and understand what the will of God is, what the existing problem is, and what the consequences of not repenting are. The overall problem is a failure to keep their end of the covenant. It is unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and a breach of contract. The people are warned repeatedly if you fail to keep your end of the promise, you will lose the Promised Land. Again, it is very important for God to get the word across to the people. Repeatedly God issued the conditional warning through Moses in route to the Promised Land. The warning was then repeated as they arrived at the Promised Land and the same warning was repeated over and over again as they lived in the Promised Land.

The era of Old Testament prophecy covers the history of the divided nation and the time they were in exile. There were a lot of Old Testament prophets sent by God to deliver the word of God to the people, plead with the people to repent, and warn the people of the consequences of failing to do so. Many times Jesus quotes the Old Testament prophets and his message is congruent with theirs because it is the word of God. It is not the word of priests, or the word of popularity; it is the word of God. A big lesson for us is that we are to stay true to word of God in spite of what is popular within the realm of mainstream society.

Old Testament prophecy has a common theme. First they call out the sin and tell people what they are doing is wrong and against the will of God. Second the people are given a chance to change as a call for repentance is issued. Then there is a warning about the consequences if they fail to obey. Finally there is the promise of redemption that will come if they repent.

After Solomon died the nation divided with Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Assyria invaded Israel because they transgressed significantly from the will of God and refused to repent. Jeremiah warned Judah that they faced the same destiny. The prophecies of Jeremiah came true. During his lifetime Jeremiah was known to be an

authentic prophet because his prophecies came true. It is important to know that there were also false prophets throughout history. However, they were telling the people what the people wanted to hear for their own popularity, position of influence, and power. With a true prophet the prophecy comes true. With a false prophet the prophecy does not come true.

God needed to get the word to the people. However, it was hard to get the word across to the people because people are stubborn and selfish. So, God used imagery, an example of something in real life that the people can relate to. Jeremiah can see the imagery and the people can relate to it as they picture in their minds the scenario. God commands Jeremiah to go to the potter's house where the potter takes a ball of clay and shapes it into something good and useful. If it does not shape up correctly, the potter breaks it down into a ball and creates something new. The potter performs a symbolic action, a metaphorical portrayal of divine power. The creating and shaping of a ball of clay is symbolic of God creating and shaping the Jewish nation. The potter has total control over the clay. Both the potter and God can destroy their creations at will and start all over again in order to make it right. The threat of destruction is conditional. It is based on whether or not the people repent. If they repent God will build them up. If they fail to repent then God will destroy them so that God can build them up from there.

In the Scripture, God sends the prophet Jeremiah to the potter's house so that Jeremiah can learn a way to get the word to the people. As the potter breaks down the clay God will do the same. As the clay is in the potter's hands, the people are in God's hands. These are powerful words of reassurance and a serious threat of punishment. God is in control. What God does is conditioned upon repentance. The potter works at his wheel, if it does not turn out right, he smashes it down into a ball, so he can start all over again. God will do same. God will destroy the nation so that God can build up nation into the correct form. Jeremiah warns the people. They hear God's offer of forgiveness but they ignore Gods demand for repentance. It is the same basic sin over and over again since Adam and Eve; humans doing their own thing and rejecting the will of God.

It is a hard lesson for them to learn. So, the nation needs a big event to serve as a lesson for future generations. It is a hard lesson for us because history repeats itself. Human nature does not change; there is always greed, selfishness, and people at odds with God. Virtually all world civilizations have failed regardless of size and complexity; the Jewish nation, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, Maya, Easter Island, etc. It is very important for us to realize how our lives relate to the text. There are many theories on the destiny of our society. But in my lifetime I have witnessed it get progressively worse as we spoil in the potters hands.