

The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 18:1-17

Topic

God likens His relationship with the nation of Israel to that of a potter working with hardened clay

Title

“Holy Potter & the Deathly Hardening”

Introduction

I’m an absolute loser when it comes to home repairs. Case in point: Several summers ago I drained our swimming pool in order to fix an ugly crack on the bottom. It’s relatively easy - that is, unless you choose the quick-drying patch plaster as opposed to the normal one.

Man, that stuff started to harden the minute I took the top off of the container! Suffice it to say that my patch looks worse than the original crack.

We are witnesses to a materials problem in our text. Jeremiah watches while a potter is molding and shaping clay on his wheel. The clay is found to be “marred” and, as a result, the potter cannot mold and shape it as he originally wanted.

God told Jeremiah that Israel in particular and all nations in general are like clay and that He, the sovereign God, is the Potter. He has a plan, He has a purpose, He has a program for the nation of Israel. But they can turn from Him causing Him to change His immediate dealings with them.

The figure of the potter and the clay has its first application to nations but it is also used of individuals.

- In Second Corinthians 4:7 believers in Jesus Christ are called “earthen vessels,” or the more poetic “jars of clay.”
- We are elsewhere described as capable of being either being vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor.

The implication is that God, the Master Potter and Craftsman, is working on **us** with a plan, a purpose, a program in mind, but that we can turn from Him. When we turn from Him it causes Him to change His immediate dealings with us.

While we contemplate the work of the Potter we have a wonderful word of encouragement to keep in mind. It's in verse four, “so he **made it again** into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.” God continues to work on you despite your rebellion.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Turn To God And He Will Make You Again, and #2 Turn From God And He Must Break You In The End.

#1 Turn To God
And He Will Make You Again
(v1-10)

When you get saved, God begins a work in you that He promises to see through to its completion. His work is to conform you into the image of Jesus Christ - to make **you** like Jesus! He says that, after you are saved, it is something He has “predestined” you to become (Romans 8:29). In First John 3:2 we are likewise promised, “it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

It is God’s plan, purpose, and program for us to become like His Son. **Along the way we are not always as cooperative as we could be.** Some of us are downright uncooperative, going our own ways and against God’s. We are "marred clay" in His hands.

It might be good to ask ourselves, as we work through these verses, not *if* we are being uncooperative with the Master Potter but *where* we are **not** cooperating and therefore need to turn back to Him.

Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying:

Jeremiah 18:2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words."

The potter's equipment consisted of two stone discs placed horizontally and joined by a vertical shaft. The lower disc would be spun using the feet; the other disc, at waist level, had on it the clay for the potter's hands to shape.

Jeremiah would have been familiar with the method of making pottery. I'm sure he knew the potter. Still God told him to go to the potter's house. That is where He would speak to Jeremiah.

You can meet with God anywhere and at anytime. But if He tells you to "go" somewhere, then do it - *because that is where He has determined to speak to you in ways that further His work in you.*

Since we are all here we can use going to church as our example. Do you have to go to church to hear from the Lord? No; but in His Word He's told you to assemble with other saints on as regular a basis as you are able. *So you'd better go if you want to hear from Him.*

Jeremiah 18:3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel.

Jeremiah 18:4 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.

The clay was "marred" in the potter's hands. You are not told the precise problem only that the clay presented a difficulty that made it unfit for the particular vessel the potter had in mind.

I wonder how long Jeremiah stood there watching before God gave him the application? We need to go where the Lord tells us to and sometimes we need to wait on the Lord there.

Jeremiah 18:5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

Jeremiah 18:6 "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!"

These words are all too often taken out of their original context and offered as a proof-text that God has cast aside Israel as an unusable lump of clay and replaced her with the church. They are also erroneously applied to individuals by saying that God casts aside whoever He wills to eternal damnation because, after all, He is the Potter and we are but useless clay anyway.

We must always read verse six in context with verses seven through ten. We must only understand the illustration of the Potter and the clay by hearing God's own commentary in these verses.

Jeremiah 18:7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,
Jeremiah 18:8 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.

Jeremiah 18:9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,
Jeremiah 18:10 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.

Wow, that's just the opposite of what some people say this means! God's sovereignty doesn't mean He has no regard for His love of mankind and our free will to choose. With regard to nations He has made His response contingent upon our choices.

God *had* and *has* a plan for the nation of Israel. In a nutshell it was for them to bring the Savior into the world and to ultimately establish the kingdom of God on the earth prior to the consummation of this current creation and the creation of new heavens and a new earth. Along the way the Jews were to reveal the glory of God to the surrounding Gentile nations so that they, too, would be saved.

Israel turned away from God time after time. These sixth century Jews to whom Jeremiah was sent to minister were gross idolators who had turned from God to walk in their own ways.

Now this is instructive in light of all our intellectual questions about God's sovereignty and man's free will. These verses teach that God most definitely grants free will. The Jews, and any other nation, could choose freely to either "turn from" evil or to do evil and not "obey [God's] voice."

At the same time we can look back over the course of history and see that God remained sovereign over His specific plan, purpose and program. Case at hand: The nation of Judah continued to turn from Him so instead of continuing to bless them God brought the Babylonian captivity upon them. It would discipline them to repentance and, at least for a time, they would turn back to Him. In returning to Him the Jews got back on the prophetic track God had outlined - that of bringing the Savior into the world.

God therefore describes Himself as granting us free will - real, honest-to-goodness free will - while acting providentially to remain in ultimate control of His universe.

Then candidate Obama made famous the statement, “that’s above my pay grade.” I am not claiming to understand or to have resolved the deep issues of the universe.

Let me put this in very down-to-earth terms. The Lord **is** coming to resurrect and rapture His church. It absolutely will be followed by the seven-year Great Tribulation which will absolutely be followed by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God on the earth. There will be a final judgment of nonbelievers, a literal Hell and a glorious Heaven.

But along the way I can freely choose to turn *to* God or *from* God. I can cooperate with His work to make me more like Jesus or I can shipwreck my life. It’s my free choice.

For His part, God will react according to His nature in order to warn me and to win my heart.

Because we are in these bodies of flesh in a world system in which Satan is the ruler, all of us turn from God. It can be in very slight, small ways; or it can be a complete meltdown into backsliding. When that is true of you, God can make **you** again.

Maybe you're going through a time when you are being affected by someone else making shipwreck of their life. Walk with the Lord and he will make **you** again.

At the potter’s house Jeremiah learned that the potter did not abandon the clay. He worked with it, on it, to create something from it - despite it’s marred condition.

God only works with marred clay. He formed Adam from the earth and ever since Adam sinned, every lump of clay that has ever been on His wheel has been marred by inherited sin.

Since He is longsuffering and patient, gracious and full of tender mercies, God continues to work with you. He "makes you again." He takes what you or others around you have ruined, corrupted, destroyed, or wasted and remakes you through it.

What do you have to do for God to make you again? **You have only to be like clay that easily yields itself to the Potter's masterful touch.**

#2 Turn From God
And He Must Break You In The End
(v11-17)

The remaining text records the insane reaction of the Jews to God's warnings.

Jeremiah 18:11 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." ' "

The Word of God was simple and straightforward. It didn't mince words. It may have sounded harsh, but only if you weren't really listening because it was an invitation to return to God.

Jeremiah 18:12 And they said, "That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart."

They said, *not* God, that there was no hope that they would turn to God. If repenting of their sin and obeying God was the only way to avoid judgment, that wasn't gonna happen. They wanted to walk according to their plans and obey the dictates of their evil hearts. Let judgement come!

What grips me is that even though it seemed hopeless, and for most of these particular Jews it remained that way, **God believed His love and longsuffering could yet reach them.**

Next we get a look at the stupidity of sin.

Jeremiah 18:13 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Ask now among the Gentiles, Who has heard such things? The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.

Jeremiah 18:14 Will a man leave the snow water of Lebanon, Which comes from the rock of the field? Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters?

Jeremiah 18:15 "Because My people have forgotten Me, They have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, From the ancient paths, To walk in pathways and not on a highway,

- God compared His chosen nation to a “virgin” betrothed to Him who decided instead to become the promiscuous partner of dead, worthless idols.
- Then He compared them to a thirsty man abandoning the most refreshing, pure spring water to search for a drink from a puddle alongside the road.

We need to put a high priority on believing what God says in His Word because, believe me, we can talk ourselves into believing that *promiscuity* and the *puddle* are better for us. In life we always find that short term pleasures lead to long term sorrows.

Jeremiah 18:16 To make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing; Everyone who passes by it will be astonished And shake his head.

Every Gentile watching the nation of Judah had eternity in his or her heart. They had a knowledge there was a God from creation, and they had conscience to tell them there was something more.

They were like Rahab who, when the Jews first entered the promised land, was seeking the true God.

The Jews abandoned their mission to reveal God because they wanted to revel in sin instead. Even nonbelievers were “astonished” at their stupidity.

Jeremiah 18:17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face In the day of their calamity."

God didn't have to do this; He didn't want to, either. But since they would not turn to Him, He must relent of the good He wished to do for them and instead bring judgment upon them.

One way or the other, however, He would accomplish His plan, purpose and program to bring the Savior.

Turn from God and He will break you in the end. Having said that, I can't know what it means in any particular, specific case. If a person is backslidden, I don't know if God will break them tomorrow or ten years from now. In the New Testament God sometimes allowed sickness and even death to come upon believers for their sin. But He also sometimes seemed to do very little.

I only know that God wants to mold and shape us into something far more beautiful than any of our own plans and the dictates of our evil hearts and that it's my choice to cooperate or not. He can make all things work together for my good - even things that are certainly not good in and of themselves. As a Master Potter He can work with the marred clay others would discard.

The plaster patch in my pool is adequate but ugly. When God makes you again, He does so as a Master Potter. It's more than adequate and it's anything but ugly! But it can take time. Be patient and believe that He makes all things beautiful in His time.