

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

H. A. Ironside

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CHAPTER NINE

LESSONS FROM THE POTTER’S HOUSE

(Chaps. 18, 19)

Many are the Scripture similes taken from the potter’s house. The manufacturer of earthenware utensils was a man of no mean repute among the Hebrews, nor yet among the surrounding nations. In I Chronicles 4:22, 23, the potters are among those who “**dwelt with the king for his work.**” They were under the royal patronage and the royal eye. They speak of that communion with the Lord which is an absolute essential if there be work in accordance with His mind. The laborer must dwell with Him if he would be “**well-pleasing to Him.**”

In Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 2:27 Messiah takes the part of the offended potter, dashing in pieces the unworthy vessel. Isaiah in chapters 29:16 and 64:8 of his magnificent prophecy, and Paul in Romans 9:20, 23, use the same figure as this chapter in Jeremiah brings before us. God is the Potter, we are but the clay in His hands. (See also Isaiah 30:14).

The feet of the great image of Gentile power and dominion in Daniel 2:41 are part of iron and part of potter’s clay; the iron speaking of strong authority, the pottery of the unstable masses; all alike to be smitten by the Stone that shall soon fall from heaven at the second appearing of earth’s rightful King. It is noticeable, too, that with the money paid for the betrayal of the Lord Jesus, the “**potter’s field**” was purchased to be a place to bury strangers in. This earth is but the Potter’s field. It was ever His own: but in a most solemn sense it was purchased by the suffering of the Son of God; and what a vast burial-place it is! He, the heavenly stranger, was buried in it Himself; but He rose in triumph, and is alive forevermore. Soon, from earth and sea, He shall call into life the dust of all His saints to share His excellent glory; and, later, awake the unrepentant by the summons to judgment!

Solemn and needful lessons are to be learned in the house of the potter - lessons for puny man’s pride and self-sufficiency. And the Lord said to Jeremiah, “**Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words**” (chap. 18:2). In unquestioning obedience he goes to the appointed place of instruction arriving just in time to find the potter working a vessel on the wheels: marred in his hands, he takes it up anew, and as Jeremiah looked on “**he made it again, as it seemed good to the potter to make it**” (vers. 3, 4).

At once the word of the Lord came to His servant. Taking what had just occurred before his eyes, He likened it to the way in which He was about to deal with marred, sin-disfigured Israel; and not with Israel only, but, later, with many nations of the earth. The grand lesson of the divine sovereignty with which he first began his course in the school of God (chap. 1) is now illustrated and amplified for his soul's benefit.

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in My hand, O house of Israel” (vers. 5, 6).

This being an incontestable fact, none could deny His righteousness in sparing a nation, as He spared Nineveh, after sentence of judgment had gone forth - provided the guilty people should turn from their evil way and seek His face. This they all admitted. The other side would be less readily received, but equally true. If He had blessed a nation, and had spoken **“concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it,”** if it turned from the path of obedience to His voice and did evil in His sight, He would repent of the good with which He had said He would benefit them (vers. 7-10).

- The first proposition was the only ground for hope left to Judah and Israel.
- The last meant their undoing, for it pictured their case exactly.

Therefore Jeremiah is to go again to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the warning that the Lord had devised evil against them; but he is also to exhort them to return from their iniquitous course, and to make their ways and their doings good (ver. 11). On their part, however, there was no sign of penitence - not to speak of repentance. With that awful boldness that so often characterizes men away from God, they replied, **“There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart”** (ver. 12).

They had committed themselves to a course of rebellion and treachery, and they desired nothing better than their own godless way. Who can tell the depths to which even one who has known much of divine care and guidance can sink when once a good conscience has been put away? The Lord's patience and grace are markedly manifested in the following verses, albeit His long-tarrying judgment must soon be carried out. Who among the heathen had heard of anything so horrible as that which the virgin of Israel had done? Had the snow of Lebanon ceased to supply the cold flowing waters of the springs? (ver. 14).

In other words, had His gracious provision for their refreshment failed, that they should have forgotten Him and have burned incense to vanity? They had stumbled in their ways, from the ancient paths, had walked in bypaths and in a way not cast up-that is, in a way that He had not marked out for them. Their land should be made desolate, so that every passer-by should be astonished, and they themselves should be scattered as with an east wind - the wind of adversity. How have the centuries since testified to the truth of these words!

At the time they were uttered the prophet's hearers refused to credit them; and playing on the words of the Lord, they said, **“Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah.”**

They would make him the responsible party, and they sought to wreak their vengeance on the servant, in place of bowing to the words of the Master. With vainglorious self-confidence, they cried, **“The law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet!”**

They referred, of course, to their own false priests, teachers, and prophets, whom God had not sent nor anointed. **“Come, and let us smite him with the tongue,”** said they, **“and let us not give heed to any of his words”** (ver. 18).

In place of contending with them, Jeremiah makes his supplication to the One who had sent him; for **“the servant of the Lord must not strive.”** At the very moment when they in their bitter hatred and hostility had **“dugged a pit”** for his soul, he prays, **“Remember that I stood before Thee to speak good for them, and to turn away Thy wrath from them”** (ver. 20). But because they despised their own mercies, and persisted in their willful course, he makes intercession, as Elijah had done, against them, and calls for the fulfilment of his prophecy (vers. 21, 23).

In the first verse of chap. 19 he is sent to get a potter’s earthen bottle, and is told to take elders of the people and of the priests with him as witnesses. Going forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, the place where the refuse of the city was afterwards burned, but which at this time was still the theater of the performance of the abominable rites of Moloch-worship, he was to proclaim once more to the kings of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem both the guilt of the people and the judgment that was about to be meted out to them (vers. 2-5).

The Valley of Hinnom should soon be known as the Valley of Slaughter; for as they had slain their sons in that dreadful Tophet as offerings to Baal and Moloch, He would cause them to fall there by the sword of their enemies, and would give their unburied carcasses to be meat for the fowls of heaven and the beasts of the field (vers. 6-9).

The bottle was then to be broken in the sight of the ancients, as he proclaimed the Lord’s message: **“Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter’s vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury”** (ver. 11).

Such should be the end of their rejection of God for the idols of the heathen. Returning from Tophet, or the valley of Hinnom, **“he stood in the court of the Lord’s house, and said to all the people, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear My words”** (vers. 14, 15). He had warned, pleaded, and entreated, but their hearts had not relented. They must know the bitterness of the cup of His wrath.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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