

Jeremiah

Chapter 18

At the Potter's House

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” ³ So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. ¹¹ “Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’ ¹² But they will reply, ‘It’s no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.’” ¹³ Therefore this is what the LORD says: “Inquire among the nations: Who has ever heard anything like this? A most horrible thing has been done by Virgin Israel. ¹⁴ Does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow? ¹⁵ Yet my people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They made them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up. ¹⁶ Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads. ¹⁷ Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster.” ¹⁸ They said, “Come, let’s make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let’s attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says.” ¹⁹ Listen to me, O LORD; hear what my accusers are saying! ²⁰ Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me. Remember that I stood before you and spoke in their behalf to turn your wrath away from them. ²¹ So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle. ²² Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for my feet. ²³ But you know, O LORD, all their plots to kill me. Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

18:1–20:18 Three chapters focusing on lessons the Lord taught Jeremiah at the potter's workshop, probably before 605 B.C. (see note on 17:15). (CSB)

18:1–17† As the potter controls what he does with the clay, so the Lord shapes the destiny of the people of Judah. (CSB)

18:1–11 Jeremiah is sent to a potter to receive an object lesson in the principles of divine government, according to which God makes and keeps both His promises and threats. (TLSB)

18:2 *Go down.* The potter's workshop was probably located on the slopes of the Valley of Ben Hinnom near the Potsherd Gate (see 19:2 and note). (CSB)

His workshop being located in the lower part of the city, near the clay-pits. (Kretzmann)

18:3 *wheel.* Lit. "two stones." Both wheels were attached to a single upright shaft, one end of which was sunk permanently in the ground. The potter would spin the lower wheel with his foot and would work the clay on the upper wheel; the process is described in the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (38:29–30). (CSB)

Only biblical reference to a potter's wheel for molding clay. (TLSB)

Literally, "on the disks," for the potter's lathe consisted of two horizontal wooden plates, the lower one larger than the upper, the clay being molded into shape on the upper disk. (Kretzmann)

18:4–6 Chem: "God has us in His hand as a potter has a lump of clay. He works the clay so we might grow into a holy temple of God, Eph. 2:21. But we, while in the hands of God, who is fashioning us, destroy His work, Rom. 14:20; and God breaks in pieces that ruined vessel and throws it in with the rest of the unformed mass, Ps 2:9. But soon He turned and picked up that clay and 'made it into another vessel as seemed good to Him,' Jer. 18:4.... These words certainly should not be twisted to teach that God is the cause of sin" (*LTh* 1:199). Ger: "God is an utterly free agent; therefore we should not reduce His works to the calculations of our reason nor rashly demand of Him an account of His actions" (ThC E2 § 284). (TLSB)

18:4 *marred.* The Hebrew for this word is translated "ruined" in 13:7 with respect to the linen belt that Jeremiah had hidden (see note there). (CSB)

as seemed best to him. The flaw was in the clay itself, not in the potter's skill. (CSB)

The potter did not immediately discard the clay when it turned into an unsatisfactory product. So also the Lord reserves for Himself the right to have mercy on His chosen nation, or any other nation marred by evil. (TLSB)

18:6 *Like clay ... so are you.* Biblical imagery often pictures mankind as made of clay by a potter (see Job 4:19 and note). (CSB)

Namely, in discarding a people that had proved unfaithful to His call and choosing others in its stead. (Kretzmann)

potter. The Hebrew for this word is translated “Maker” in 10:16 with reference to God. (CSB)

Still in a position to be molded if they but heeded His call. (Kretzmann)

18:7–10† The Lord can grant pardon and restoration and can execute his threats of judgment and destruction. (CSB)

If ... if ... if ... if.† God will change his preannounced response to man, depending on what the latter does (see note on 4:28; see also Joel 2:13; Jnh 3:9 and note; Jnh 3:8–4:2; 4:11). (CSB)

18:7 AT ANY TIME – Namely, in a moment of time. (Kretzmann)

uprooted, torn down and destroyed. See 1:10 and note. (CSB)

God is threatening extermination. (Kretzmann)

18:8 See 26:3. *evil ... disaster.* The Hebrew is the same for both words (also in v. 11). (CSB)

God is giving heed to His warnings. (Kretzmann)

I WILL RELENT – In accordance with His long-suffering and mercy, according to which He does not desire the death of the sinner. (Kretzmann)

18:9 *built up and planted.* See 1:10 and note. (CSB)

God uses words by which He called Jeremiah to be His ambassador. (TLSB)

Having arranged to carry out a plan of blessing upon it, to give it a position of power and authority above others. (Kretzmann)

18:10 I WILL RECONSIDER – The obstinacy and wickedness of such a people depriving it of the blessings which the Lord would freely have vouchsafed all its members. It is man's own fault if he does not become a partaker of the benefits which God's kindness and mercy would like to bestow upon all men. (Kretzmann)

18:11 *devising a plan.* See Est 8:3; 9:25; Eze 38:10. (CSB)

Shaping a plan to work destruction as the potter shapes the clay on his wheel. (Kretzmann)

turn from. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “repents of” in v. 8. (CSB)

18:12 *It’s no use.* See 2:25; see also note on Isa 57:10. (CSB)

follow the stubbornness of his evil heart. See note on 3:17. (CSB)

The negative answer Jeremiah received to his solemn declaration from the Lord was evidence that the hearts of his hearers, hardened by stubbornness and self-will, were not malleable for reworking. (TLSB)

18:13–17 See 2:10–13. (CSB)

18:13 *horrible thing.* See 5:30; 23:14; Hos 6:10. (CSB)

An act which was abominable in His sight. (Kretzmann)

How unbelievable unbelief is! No nation gives up its god, but that’s exactly what Judah had done. (PBC)

Virgin Israel. See 14:17 and note. (CSB)

The Lord's betrothed, in whose case one would not have believed such shameless indecency possible. (Kretzmann)

18:14–15 Although nature is reliable (v. 14), Judah is fickle and unfaithful (v. 15). (CSB)

Contrasts the constancy of inanimate creation with the inconstancy of God’s people, who turned away from their Creator to man-made idols. (TLSB)

18:14 *Lebanon.* One of the highest of the northern mountains (see 22:6), reaching an altitude of over 10,000 feet. (CSB)

SNOW...VANISH – Literally, "Will the snow of Lebanon desert the rock of the mountain range?" the point of comparison being in the fact that the snow of the mountains is perennial. (Kretzmann)

Sirion? Snow-capped Mount Hermon. (TLSB)

COOL WATERS...CEASE TO FLOW – Will the strange, cold, rippling waters, fed by the glaciers of Hermon, dry up? As the snow covers the summits of Lebanon with a perpetual mantle, so the flow of waters at its foot is perpetual, there is no interruption,

the connection between the two is unbroken. All the more reprehensible, then, is the conduct of the people of Judah. (Kretzmann)

18:15 *my people have forgotten me.* Repeated from 2:32 (see note there). (CSB)

burn incense. See note on 1:16. (CSB)

worthless idols. Lit. “nothing” (see Ps 31:6). The Hebrew for this phrase is different from that in either 2:5 or 2:8 (see note on 2:8). (CSB)

To the idols, which are nothing in the sight of God. (Kretzmann)

which made them stumble. See 2Ch 28:23. (CSB)

Thus leaving the way of the conduct prescribed by God in ancient days. (Kretzmann)

ancient paths. See note on 6:16. (CSB)

roads not built up. See note on Isa 35:8. (CSB)

18:16 *waste ... appalled.* The same Hebrew root underlies both words. (CSB)

Taking note of the desolation which had come upon the former rich land. (Kretzmann)

object of ... scorn. See 19:8; 25:9, 18; 29:18; 51:37. The phrase implies hissing or whistling to express shock, ridicule and contempt. (CSB)

all ... appalled. See 19:8; 1Ki 9:8. (CSB)

Be rigid with astonishment. (Kretzmann)

shake their heads. See 48:27; Job 16:4 and note; see also Ps 44:14; 109:25. (CSB)

In a gesture expressing malicious enjoyment of their misfortune. (Kretzmann)

18:17 *wind from the east.* See note on 4:11; see also Ps 48:7. (CSB)

A violent wind from the desert. (Kretzmann)

show them my back and not my face. As the people themselves had done to God (see 2:27). His face symbolizes his gracious blessing and favor (see Nu 6:24–26). (CSB)

This being done in just retribution upon them, for they had turned their backs to Him and refused Him obedience, chap. 2, 27. This threat on the part of God filled the reprobates

with fury, which was promptly directed against Jeremiah, His faithful servant.
(Kretzmann)

18:18–23 The fifth of Jeremiah’s “confessions” (see Introduction: Author and Date).
(CSB)

18:18 *They*. Jeremiah’s enemies (see note on 17:15). (CSB)

plans against Jeremiah. See v. 12; 11:18–23; 12:6; 15:10–11, 15–21. (CSB)

Planning wicked designs against his person and life. (Kretzmann)

teaching of the law. Delegated to the priests (see note on Dt 31:11). (CSB)

The meaning evidently is this, that they had no need of Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, since they would always have priests to instruct them, wise men to advise them, and prophets to proclaim to them the Word of the Lord, men, moreover, more to their liking, who would not be forever harping on the subject of repentance and judgment.
(Kretzmann)

priest ... wise ... prophets. See 8:8–10; see also Eze 7:26, where the wise are replaced by the elders. (CSB)

attack him with our tongues. See note on 9:3. (CSB)

Making life unbearable for him by defamation, shortening his life by the grief caused him by this manner of dealing with him. (Kretzmann)

PAY NOT ATTENTION TO ANYTHING HE SAYS – This being another way in which they intended to show their spite. The prophet, therefore, raises his voice in an earnest appeal to God. (Kretzmann)

Jeremiah’s indictment only increased Israel’s resistance to being reworked (v. 4). The spiritual leaders rejected Jeremiah’s claim that they were deceiving the people (cf 4:9–10; 8:8–12; 14:13–18). Hostility towards God’s messenger grew from passive stubbornness (v. 12) to plots designed to silence him forever. Rather than heed his words, they agreed to use them against him on trumped-up charges. Opponents of Jesus also sought “to trap Him in His talk” and accused Him of serious, punishable offenses (Mk 12:13; cf Lk 23:2) (TLSB)

18:19–23 For protection against the wicked leaders and their plots against his life, Jeremiah turns to the Lord, who had promised to protect him and make him strong against his opponents.
(TLSB)

18:19 **LISTEN TO ME** – Listening attentively to his cry for deliverance and protection.
(Kretzmann)

18:20 *good ... repaid with evil.* See Ps 35:12. (CSB)

Namely, by the fact that the evil plans of his adversaries would be successful. (Kretzmann)

dug a pit. Symbolic of his enemies' plots against him (see v. 22; Ps 57:6 and note; Pr 22:14; 23:27). (CSB)

Method of trapping animals, commonly mentioned in the Psalms. (TLSB)

stood before you. See note on 15:1. (CSB)

Jeremiah interceded for his people until forbidden to do so (7:16; 11:14). (TLSB)

spoke in their behalf. See 14:7–9, 21. (CSB)

Pleading that the Lord would not visit their iniquity upon them. (Kretzmann)

18:21 SO GIVE THEM – Because they disregarded all attempts to bring them to their senses and increased in wickedness from day to day. (Kretzmann)

hand them over to the power of the sword. The Hebrew underlying this phrase occurs also in Ps 63:10; Eze 35:5. (CSB)

In the Hebrew, being regarded as possessing hands to perform its murderous work. (Kretzmann)

be put to death. Lit. “be slain by death,” probably referring to plague, as in 15:2 (see note there). (CSB)

The punishment God threatened to inflict (and later did) was no less gruesome. (cf 14:16). (TLSB)

YOUNG MEN SLAIN – Literally, “their sons.” A note on 6:11 says, “When the Lord’s wrath inundates the city, all its inhabitants – from the children to the very aged – will become war casualties. (TLSB)

18:22–23 See Ps 141:8–10. (CSB)

18:22 *hidden snares.* See Ps 140:5; 142:3. (CSB)

As the fowler does for the bird. (Kretzmann)

18:23 *you know, O LORD.* See 12:3; 15:15. (CSB)

Being fully aware of their murderous plans against Jeremiah. (Kretzmann)

Do not forgive their crimes ... Let them be overthrown before you. † A prayer not for human vengeance but for divine vindication. There comes a “time of ... anger” when God will no longer blot out sin (cf. Ps 95:8–11; 2Co 6:1–2; Heb 3:7–11). (CSB)

There comes a time when God no longer overlooks the sin of those who harden their hearts (cf. Ps 95:8; 2Co 6:1–2; Heb 3:7–18). (CSB)

blot out. The Phoenician cognate of the Hebrew for this phrase appears in a ninth-century B.C. inscription on a gateway: “If ... a man ... blots out the name of Azitawadda from this gate ... may (the gods) wipe out ... that man!” (CSB)

Ch 18 Committed to their idolatry and self-centered lifestyles, the Judeans refuse to respond to the Lord’s gracious invitation to repent of their sin. Their rejection of God is plainly seen in their mistreatment of His prophet Jeremiah. Those who proclaim God’s Word faithfully will likely face persecution. Yet believers stand in grace, confident of God’s love. He makes us a new creation just as a potter reworks a lump of clay. • Anchor us in Christ crucified, O Lord, and keep us faithful to You. Shape our lives through Jesus, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)