

The Parables:

According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another." For today's study we are going to leave the New Testament and consider a "parable-like" passage from the Old Testament. God has used this passage of Scripture to encourage my heart on several occasions. It is my prayer that you will be blessed by these truths as well. This study is for everyone who has lost hope because she has made mistakes.

The Potter and the Clay

By Mary Kane

When my oldest son, Erik, was just a little boy, I entered him in the three-year-old clay class at Fernwood Nature Center. As I was a stay at home mom, this was my little guy's first venture into the big world without his mother—we were both a little nervous. After we arrived at Fernwood, I walked Erik into his classroom and introduced him to his teacher. Within a few minutes, Erik was happily working away with his clay. I slipped out the door and walked the beautiful nature trails until he was finished.



When I returned, my little boy had two beautiful projects to show me; a punch-pot and a pencil topper. I loved my presents! As I examined my precious gifts, I noticed that the punch-pot was covered with Erik's fingerprints. These gifts are priceless to me, not because they are made of a costly medium such as gold or platinum, but because my son molded these little lumps of clay with his own two hands. My little boy is now a big strong man who is a senior at Cedarville University, but to this day his punch-pot holds my earrings, bracelets and other nick-knacks and the pencil topper resides in a place of honor on my dresser, on top of my jewelry box, next to a sand-art totem pole (a gift from my other son).

We are not unlike those clay vessels; dearly loved and cherished by a parent. And like those clay vessels we too are covered with the fingerprints of our Creator. How precious we are to our Heavenly Father.

Please quiet your mind and heart and ask God to forgive your sins and to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit, that you may learn from His Holy Word.

Now please read Jeremiah 18:1-6.

The name *Jeremiah* means "raised up or appointed by Jehovah." Whenever an *-ah* is placed at the end of a Hebrew name it indicates that *Jehovah* is part of that name. Called by God while he was still young, Jeremiah was one of the "greater prophets" of the Old Testament. He left his home town and went to live in Jerusalem, where he assisted King Josiah with his reformation work. The death of Josiah was bewailed as a national calamity by Jeremiah. During the short reign of King Jehoahaz, there was no mention of Jeremiah, but during the reign of his predecessor, Jehoiakim, bitter persecution broke out against the Prophet. He was thrown into prison for preaching to the people about their sin. When King Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was still in jail. The Chaldeans finally captured Jerusalem and took pity on Jeremiah; he was quickly released from prison. Jeremiah then went to live in Mizpah. Eventually, the prophet ended up in Egypt where he probably lived out the remainder of his years, still seeking to turn the people of Israel back to their God and Father.

Now let's dig into the text to see what we can learn from the Holy Word of God.

Please fill in the missing words from verse 1:

"The _____ which came to Jeremiah from the Lord -
_____..."

In the NKJV the verse reads, "The word which came to Jeremiah saying..."

Word in the original Hebrew means (among other things) "to speak, declare, converse, promise, command." The original Hebrew word for *saying* is *amar* which means "to say, to speak, to say in ones heart, to

be told, to be called.” Let’s file this information away in our heads for a later application.

What does God tell Jeremiah to do in the first part of verse 2?

He tells Jeremiah to *arise* and *go down* to the potter’s house.

I am very familiar with the word *arise* used in this verse; it is the same word used in the Ruth 1:6, “and she [Naomi] *arose* with her daughters in law.” In the original language *arise* is transliterated as *kum* which means to stir up, to strengthen, to confirm, to ratify, to covenant, to raise up, to establish.” In verse 2, God is causing Jeremiah to go down to the potter’s house because He has something important to illustrate to him.

What was to happen at the potter’s house (end of verse 2)?

God was going to “cause Jeremiah to hear” God’s Words. In other words, God was going to give Jeremiah the ability to understand the important message God had for His people.

According to verse 3, what was the potter doing?

Have you ever had the privilege of watching a potter create something on his wheel? It is very fascinating to watch as the clay seems to sift through the potters fingers like magic. It only takes a little pressure to completely change the shape of the clay that is being worked.

When I used to teach kindergarten, I often used clay in my classroom. One of the remarkable qualities that makes clay suitable for classroom use is that it never dries out... it is always formable and moldable. Right out of the container, my students always had trouble working the clay

because it was hard and cold. But the longer my students worked the clay with their hands, the softer it became. That is why we always want to stay close to our Father; right in the palm of His hand so we too will stay soft and moldable.

According to Genesis 2:7, what is man made of?

According to the design of God, we are made of clay! God choose to make us of a material that is inherently moldable. We are meant to be molded by the hand of God throughout the course of life. Think about it...He could have chosen to make us of iron, glass, ice or stone, but He chose clay. By design, we are destined for change.

Several years ago when I was going through a very exciting season of change with God, one of my acquaintances remarked disparagingly that I had changed so much that he could hardly recognize me anymore. I remember thinking "What a wonderful compliment; hopefully I'm a lot less like myself and a whole lot more like Jesus."

The word used for *potter* in this section of scripture is *yatsar* which means to form, fashion, to create. Potter could also then be translated as *creator*. *Yatsar* is closely related to another Hebrew word which means to suffer distress, to be in straits, besiege, be distressed. Please focus your thoughts for a moment on these two definitions.

Now please link these two concepts together; creation and suffering. How does one lead to the other?

When God allows hard things, hurtful circumstances, conditions that cause suffering, to come into our lives; could it be that He is using them to form us, change us and shape us into the image of His Son Jesus? Perhaps the things that make us suffer are the tools that God uses to create something new and beautiful in our character.

Can you think of a hard or hurtful time in your life that in retrospect brought about a Christ-like change in your character?

Honestly, was it worth the suffering?

If your answer was no, will you at least continue to trust God through your pain?

Please go back and read verse 4 again.

What happened to the vessel that the potter made?

It was *marred* in the hand of the potter. The word for *marred* means corrupted, spoiled, injured, ruined. How did the vessel become corrupted? There were impurities in the clay. Considering ourselves to be jars of clay, how did we become marred? God's Word says that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We too have impurities. The sin we have chosen has marred ourselves and all creation.

Due to the condition of the pot, what did the potter have to do?

The potter had to *remake* the pot into another vessel; into a vessel that would be useful and effective in the hand of the Father. The Hebrew word for *again* used in this verse is *shuwb* which means to return, to turn back, come back, to turn back to God, to restore, refresh, repair. In order to render the pot useful for God's purpose, the flaw in the vessel had to be repaired. We too were created for a purpose and because of our flaws, we also must be recreated so we can become all that God created us to be.

Why did God give this revelation to Jeremiah?

So that the people of God could know that there is hope for the flawed condition of their souls. Do you remember the definition for *word* way back in the beginning of this study? God had *commanded* Jeremiah to tell His people about the process of recreating vessels so that they would know of this great hope; that we are not forever trapped by our sins and weaknesses. Praise God that He is more than able to take us as we are, flaws and all, and remake us into a useful vessel, perfectly equipped to serve in His kingdom!

We end this study with a wonderful reminder.

According to verse 6, where are we right now?

We are right where we should be, right where we belong...in the palm of the Potter's hand.

Abba, Father, you are the Potter

We are the clay, the work of your hands.

Isaiah 64:8

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabolē* (Strong's 3850)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G3850&t=KJV> >