

The Potter's House

Part One

By John H. Essex

WHERE, or what, is the Potter's House?

The expression, "the potter's house" (KJV), or "the house of the potter" (CV), occurs twice in the same passage in God's Word, namely, Jeremiah 18:2,3. Let us read from verse 1 to verse 12.

The word which comes to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying,

"Rise and go down to the house of the potter,
And there I will announce to you My words."
And I am going down to the house of the potter,
Yet the vessel which he is making of the clay
Is ruined in the hand of the potter.
And he turns it back and is making another vessel of it as it is
upright in the eyes of the potter to make it.
And coming is the word of Yahweh to me, saying,
"As this potter does, cannot I do to you, house of Israel?"

Averring is Yahweh,

"Behold! As the clay in a potter's hand,
So are you in My hand, house of Israel.
The moment I speak of a nation or of a kingdom,
To pluck them up, to break down and destroy,
And that nation turns back
From all the evil of which I spoke,
Then I regret the evil which I had designed to do to them.
And the moment I speak of a nation or of a kingdom,
To build and to plant,
And they do evil in My eyes,
To avoid hearkening to My voice,
Then I regret the good, the good I spoke to do to them.
And now speak, pray, to the men of Judah,
And to the dwellers of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says Yahweh:
`Behold! I am forming evil against you....'"

It is clear that in this passage the potter's house is being used as an illustration for the instruction of Israel through one of her prophets. If the work of the potter was confined in Scripture to this one incident, important though it is, we doubt whether we would have chosen it as the basis of our meditation in this series of studies. But we propose to point out other references to the work of the potter, and some in places where it is perhaps not at first evident.

Before we proceed further, let us make the point that the potter's house is a place of employment, the place where he plies his craft, and not necessarily a place of residence, though he *may* live there. We speak today of "business houses," and those who own them do not usually live on the premises. The potter's house is where he operates, and where he demonstrates his skill.

"GO DOWN"

The potter's house of Jeremiah 18 was evidently in a valley, for the prophet was instructed to "go down" to it. Prepositions in the Scriptures are very important, and God's Word speaks of "going *up*" to Jerusalem and "going *down*" to Egypt; *up* to heaven and *down* to the pit or grave.

Here it is *down* to the potter's house because physically the prophet had to descend to get to it. Spiritually, he had to humble himself if he wished to learn of God. We all have to do this if we would learn of Him, since God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. We must put aside our own conceits-- our own preconceived notions--and seek our knowledge in the place which He appoints. Many of the sorrows confronting humans today are caused by their neglect of God's Word, and their preference for their own ideas rather than the principles which God has wisely ordained. God's wisdom has become stupidity to them, and man's wisdom has likewise become stupidity to God. Yet man was created in God's image and likeness!

There are quite a number of lessons to be learned in the potter's house. The incident that the prophet witnessed was a simple one, almost trivial, yet the lessons to be gained from it were profound in their depth of meaning.

VALUABLE LESSONS

Firstly we note that the vessel is marred (ruined), but the potter does not repair it. He brings the clay back to an unrecognizable lump, and then makes another vessel.

To introduce a personal note, we once saw this happen when we visited a tiny pottery in South Wales. Over the entrance was an inscription, taken from the KJV of Romans 9, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor?" Once inside, we saw a potter at his wheel, and he had just made what seemed to us to be a perfect vase. But something about it displeased him, for he immediately crushed it between his hands, and then worked on the shapeless clay to make another vessel, this time a bowl. This evidently satisfied him, for he set it to one side, ready for the kiln.

Secondly, we perceive that the vessel was ruined *in the hand of the potter*. In the subsequent verses, God likens Himself to this potter, and the nation of Israel to the marred vessel. But Israel, for all her faults, for all her disobedience, for all her rebellions against God, is never allowed to slip out of His hand. The same is true of humanity and indeed of the whole universe. Because creation is never out of His hands, God accepts responsibility for all that happens to His creatures. Let us note, responsibility is quite different from accountability; God still requires all to be accountable to Him.

Thirdly, we note that the vessel is ruined from the moment that it was made. In the case of Israel, the nation was marred or ruined from the time of its birth at Sinai. This was demonstrated by the fact that, even while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of the Covenant which the newly-formed nation had promised to keep, the people were building a golden calf to worship. Again, the beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the sanctuary (Acts 3), who was illustrative of Israel, was "inherently lame from his mother's womb."

THE POTTER'S PREROGATIVES

"He...is making another vessel of it." These words reflect the power of the potter to make anew. The new vessel may be like the old, or it may be something quite different, as we saw in the pottery in Wales when the vase was turned into a bowl. In the incident which Jeremiah saw, we feel reasonably certain that the new vessel would be similar to the old, for the incident was intended to illustrate God's dealings with Israel, and the new nation of Israel will be like the old in that it will not be a new creation but a new birth. The promises to Israel in Peter's first epistle are a reaffirmation of those made by God to the nation at Sinai (compare 1 Peter 2:9 with Ex.19:5). But now they are made more positive, for the 'if' clause is removed.

The potter has both the right and the power to do what he wills with the clay that is in his hand. "He is making another vessel of it *as is upright in the eyes of the potter to make it....* As this potter does, cannot I do to you, house of Israel?" Chapters 18 and 19 of Jeremiah detail God's actions against Israel because, as He says, "they stiffen their scruff (harden their necks] to avoid hearkening to My words." God can do evil as well as good.

Before we leave the matter as it applies to Israel, let us note Isaiah 45:11, "Thus says Yahweh Elohim, the Holy One of Israel, and its Former." The word here translated *Former* (*Maker* in the King James Version) is the one rendered *potter* in Jeremiah 18. Verily God is the Potter of Israel.

PAUL'S APPLICATION OF THE POTTER'S CRAFT

So much, then, for Jeremiah's prophecy. But Paul also refers us to the potter's craft in a remarkable passage in his letter to the Romans. He, too, affirms the right of the potter to do what he wills with the clay that is in his hand. This is true of every potter, but particularly so of the Divine Potter.

Paul's lessons, learned from observing the potter at work, are, however, different from those taught in Jeremiah. Paul sees the potter not just making a new vessel out of an old one, but forming two vessels out of the same lump of clay, indeed, out of the same kneading, and one of these is for honor and one for dishonor. As the Divine Potter, can God, in justice, do this? Paul has no doubts on the matter, He most certainly can.

Again introducing a personal note, we were speaking many years ago on the lessons of the potter, and emphasized that there was only one Potter, namely, God. Someone came up afterwards and said, "Yes, there is only one Potter, and *there is only one clay.*"

We had missed this vital point, and how true it is! All Humanity is of the same clay, and there are vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. Cain and Abel in the same generation--one a murderer and the other a righteous man. And even closer--twins of the same birth, Jacob to love and Esau to hate. And how can God be justified in this, especially as He Himself predetermined The future of both Jacob and Esau before they were born, and thus before they had any opportunity to prove themselves? God can be merciful to one vessel while hardening another. He can raise up both a Moses and a Pharaoh, being merciful to the former while hardening the heart of the latter. How can God be justified in what He does? Only in the light of the ultimate outcome of His purpose, when He is to be merciful to all; indeed, when He is to be All in all, for then He will have more than made up for what the vessels of dishonor may have temporarily lost.

ALL TO BE MADE NEW

We have already indicated that God will not be satisfied with a patched up job. "New am I making all," He declares in Revelation 21:5. He may endure the ruined vessels for a time, but eventually they are destroyed in order to be made anew, and in the new, nothing of the marring of the old is remembered. Isaiah 65:17 reads, "Behold Me creating new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor shall they come upon the heart." In Revelation 21:4 we have, "And death will be no more, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery: they will be no more, for the former things passed away," and in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new! "

Summing up, then, what we have so far noted, God has the right to make vessels for His own use, in whatever form He chooses, and He has also the right to use them in whatever way He wills, "that the purpose of God may remain as a choice, not out of acts, but of Him Who is calling" (Rom.9:11).

THE POTTER'S HOUSE

Returning to our original question, we ask again, Where, or what, is the Potter's House? And we are, of

course, referring to God as the Divine Potter.

Remember, the potter's house is not where he dwells, but where he works, or operates, and we have to descend to find it.

We submit that the Potter's house, in a wider sense, is this earth on which we live. Here God has been working out His purpose for thousands of years. Has He not said, in effect, to the celestials, "Rise and go down to the house of the Potter, and there I will announce to you My words?"

Remember that, prior to the appearance of humanity upon this earth, there had been a disruption, and the earth, created in light, had become a submerged chaos, shrouded in darkness. The physical disarray upon the earth was indicative of the spiritual disarray in the heavens. Celestials, who had rebelled against the Headship of Christ, had no way of effecting reconciliation with God. This could only be accomplished by God Himself; He must make the move, and He directs their attention to this earth.

The earth is a mere speck in the universe. Saying that God created the heavens and the earth is as incongruous as saying that He created the Atlantic Ocean and a raindrop, or a continent and a grain of sand, so vast are the heavens, so small is the earth. Yet the earth becomes the theater of the universe, the stage upon which the greater part of God's purpose is enacted. The celestials are the audience, but who are the actors? Are they not the members of humanity, whom the Director is moving about the stage according to His preconceived plan, for the Scriptures speak of "the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will" (Eph.1:11; see also Eph.3:10,11).

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