

Jeremiah Learns Lessons from a Potter



Scripture Reference: [Jeremiah 18-19](#)

Suggested Theme: God is in control of nations and of our lives.

Memory Verse: “God is King of all the earth. So sing a song of praise to him. God is King over the nations. God sits on his holy throne.” [Psalm 47:7-8, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Jeremiah continued to preach and prophesy the word of the Lord as he watched the Kings of Judah lead the kingdom to its downfall. God sent Jeremiah to watch a potter at work. In watching the potter mold the clay, Jeremiah learned that Judah was in the hands of God just as the clay was in the hands of the potter. Later, the Lord told Jeremiah to destroy one of the potter’s clay jars by smashing it in front of the leaders of Judah. This showed how the Kingdom of Judah would be destroyed if the people did not turn to God.

Background Study:

You might notice as you are reading that God’s people are again referred to as “Israel.” This is the original name that had been used for all of His people before the nation divided into two, calling themselves Israel and Judah. The half of the divided kingdom that had taken the name “Israel” no longer existed at this time. Only Judah remained. It can seem confusing because the name “Israel” begins to be used again. More and more, as time goes by, all of God’s people will again be referred to as “Israel.” [Background Information on the Divided Kingdom.](#)

Jeremiah became a prophet during the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. The political situation in Judah’s capital city of Jerusalem had changed since Josiah’s time. Josiah was killed in a battle with the king of Egypt. Josiah’s son Jehoahaz was appointed king but only served three months. The king of Egypt dethroned him and placed another son of Josiah on the throne. The Egyptian king changed the new king’s name to “Jehoiakim” and then took Jehoiakim’s brother back to Egypt as a captive as insurance that the new king would rule to Egypt’s advantage.

Judah was on a downward spiral, but God continued to send prophets to give the people a chance to repent. One of these prophets was Jeremiah. Jeremiah began his work as a prophet halfway into Josiah’s reign (640-609 B.C.) and continued through the destruction of Judah (586 B.C.). The Lord commanded him not to marry and raise children because future events- the fall of Judah- would wipe out the next generation ([Jeremiah 16:1-4](#)).

Jeremiah was not just telling the people what he thought. He had a message straight from God. God could have given the prophet a message anywhere He wanted to. This time, He wanted to use a visual aid in the

potter's house, so He told Jeremiah to go there for a lesson.

A potter's wheel is like a round table about two feet across. Instead of having legs at the edge, it was shaped more like a spool with a wheel at the top (the tabletop) and a wheel at the bottom. The potter used his feet to turn the wheel at the bottom, making the tabletop spin. The potter would put a lump of soft clay on the table and shape the clay while the table was spinning.

The potter was making a bowl or vase, but something went wrong and the object was ruined. We are not told what went wrong, but we suppose there was a little twig in the clay. Or perhaps a pebble or a bit of dried and hard clay fell into the clay. Striking the potter's hand as the wheel turned, it may have made a deep scratch around the vessel or even broken off the whole top of it. Then, the potter had to remove the lump, pebble, or twig and start over again.

Judah was all that remained of God's Kingdom of Israel now, and God was in charge of it, just as the potter was in charge of the clay. Sin was like a lump or pebble that spoiled the nation God wanted Judah to be. If the people got rid of their sins, God would shape them into a strong and beautiful nation; if they did not, God would crush the nation and start over again.

God is reliable in what He says or does ([Numbers 23:19](#); [Malachi 3:6](#); [James 1:17](#)). God does not change His mind, but He often allows people to repent and change their minds.

God had Jeremiah tell the people to change their evil ways. The people rejected the message, however. Later, they would receive the punishment God had prepared.

Once again, God had a message for Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 19](#)). He told Jeremiah to buy a clay pot from the potter's shop. The pot in chapter 18 was pliable and could be changed. This pot was dried and hard and set. It represented Israel when it passed the point of no return. This was Israel when it refused to turn back to God.

Jeremiah was to smash the jar and preach that it represented God's people. God will smash the nation of Judah just as the jar was smashed ([Jeremiah 19:10-11](#)).

Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring pottery items (or pictures) today. Help show the children the rings in the pottery and how the bottom is often a different texture or colour. If possible, show pictures of a potter's wheel. "Pottery making has been around for thousands of years. We can even read about pottery in the Old Testament. In today's story, we are going to learn about a prophet named Jeremiah and what happened when he visited a potter."

The Story:

Jeremiah was a prophet of God. God would give messages to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah would preach the message to the people. Sometimes, people did not like the messages that Jeremiah preached. He sometimes told them that they were sinful. He warned them that God would destroy their country if they did not stop sinning.

One time, God used a unique method to give Jeremiah a message. He told Jeremiah to go to the house of a potter. A potter was someone who made pottery. They used clay to make bowls, lamps, plates and many other dishes.

The potter would place some soft clay on a small round table. He would use his feet to make the table spin around and around. He would then use his hands to squeeze and shape the clay until it was exactly how he liked it. Then, he would put it in a hot kiln oven and bake it until it was hard.

After the clay was baked and hard, the potter could not change its shape. But when the clay was still soft, the potter could change its shape as much as he wanted.

Jeremiah watched the potter work. The potter spun the wheel and put his hands on the clay. Soon, the clay began to take shape and look like a dish. As Jeremiah watched, something happened to the clay. Maybe there was a stone in the clay or some straw. Something was making the potter unhappy. The potter finally gave up and decided to throw the clay away and start over with some more clay.

God told Jeremiah that His message was like the potter's shop. God was like the potter, and the people of Judah were like the clay. God wanted to shape His people and make them into a beautiful nation. Instead, the people kept sinning. Their sin was like a stone or straw in the clay. It stopped God from making Judah into something beautiful. God told Jeremiah to tell the people that if they did not stop sinning, then he would throw them out and let them be destroyed like the potter did to the dirty clay.

Another time, God told Jeremiah to go to the potter's shop and buy a clay jar. He told Jeremiah to take the jar and preach to the people. After he preached, he should smash the jar. God's message was to tell the people that if they obeyed Him, He would protect them. Their country would be destroyed like a jar if they did not obey Him.

Some people think that prime ministers, kings or presidents control countries. But really, God is in control of every country in the world.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

[Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.](#)

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

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Review:

- What was Jeremiah's job? (He was a prophet - he delivered God's messages to the people)
- What kind of shop did God tell Jeremiah to go to? (Potter's shop)
- How was the nation of Judah like the potter's clay? (Israel could be shaped by God, but Israel had sin in it like the clay had something in it)
- What would Israel's sin mean God would do? (He would destroy Israel and start again, just like how the potter had to throw away the clay and start again)
- What lesson did the people learn when Jeremiah smashed a clay jar? (God would destroy them if they did not obey)

- Who controls all of the countries in the world? (God)
- What did you learn about God from this story?
- What did the people learn from God's messages that He sent through Jeremiah?

Reflection:

- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What do you think the pot the potter was making looked like?
- Why do you think God wanted Jeremiah to see and use clay to give His message to the people? Why not have Jeremiah only use words?
- How do you think the people felt when they saw Jeremiah smash the clay jar and tell them God's message?
- What do you think went wrong with the potter's clay so that he threw it away?
- Have you ever seen a potter working with clay? Have you ever worked with clay? Tell us about it.
- What is another kind of art that could represent something true about God or people? (Suggestions: painting, woodworking, dancing, singing, music, sewing, cooking, etc.)
- God 'shapes' people and helps them become beautiful and good, but sometimes we are stubborn and sin and don't want God to shape us. What is a sin you struggle with?
- God is watching over and in control of the world, just like the potter watches over and controls the clay. What would the world be like if God was not in charge of the world and all its countries?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [He's Got the Whole World in His Hands Song](#)
- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- Ask a potter to demonstrate their work.

- Sing “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” from the church songbook.
- Find out the names of the political leaders of our city or country, and have the children pray for them. Then, discuss the fact that God rules each nation.
- If appropriate, send a card to government officials in your area thanking them for their hard work and telling them that your group prayed for them.
- Look up countries on a world map and pray for them. You might also pray about present problems in the world (wars, famines, etc.)

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Use clay or salt dough to make a bowl or pot. Place a small pebble in each child’s clay so they will find it as they work. The final project can be air-dried or baked in the oven. [Try this salt dough recipe here.](#) (Scroll down on that page for the recipes.)

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Recipes and instructions for making a simple clay bowl \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Printable Chart: Chronology of the Prophets after the Fall of Samaria \(Israel\) in 722 B.C. Part 1 \(Bible charts\)](#)
- [Printable Chart: Chronology of the Prophets after Fall of Samaria \(Israel\) in 722 B.C. Part 2 \(Bible charts\)](#)
- [Nice image of potter working on potter wheel \(E Bible teacher\)](#)

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Date

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