

# The Sovereign Hands of the Potter

Jeff Rogers / Empty Nesters Bible Study  
Jeremiah 18

What is sovereignty? Sovereignty is supreme power or authority; it is the dominant power in political terms; Sovereignty, politically, can rest in a person (king), the people or group of people, or a legislative body (congress or senate). Sovereignty, by default, implies complete independence, power, or authority. A Sovereign is not subject to the rule or control of another. The sovereignty of God is the fact that He is the Lord over creation; as Sovereign, He exercises His rule as King.

- God's sovereignty silences every boast.
- God's sovereignty squashes all pride.
- God's sovereignty answers every question.

## I. Jeremiah and his field trips

- A. It must be remembered that the prophet Jeremiah lived while the Kingdom of Judah was in her last years of existence before the Babylonian captivity.
- B. As such, the kingdom was sliding quickly into idolatry imported from other nations, sinful behavior that was once unthinkable was now common.
- C. Jeremiah's ministry was not one necessarily of comfort but of warning. Warnings of a sovereign God who would judge sin rather than excuse it.
- D. Jeremiah was given words and visions to express the words of warning in visual terms:
  1. Jerusalem refuses to repent. **Jeremiah 5:1**, *Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.*
  2. The example of Shiloh. **Jeremiah 7:12**, *Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.* (see Judges 18:31, 1 Sam 1:3, 4:1-12; Psalm 78:56-61, esp. v. 60)
  3. The picture of the potter's house. **Jeremiah 18:1-4**, *The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.*

## II. God is the Sovereign Potter, His People are Clay (Jeremiah 18:5-6)

- A. Stated simply, "God can do whatever he wants with you. This is what it means for him to be God. Because God is God, he is free to do whatever he pleases. In his hands rest all power, rule, control, authority, kingdom, government, and dominion."<sup>1</sup>
- B. Humans tend to bristle at anyone's sovereignty, from an HOA to a King or God.
  1. With God, some tremble at His sovereignty, and some oppose him.
  2. But, what cannot be denied is that we are not on equal terms with God. He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. God is the absolute sovereign; all others are subservient. (**Isaiah 45:9**, "Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?"
- C. The picture of the potter and the clay is appropriate.
  1. God made (formed, shaped as the potter) Adam out of the "dust" (**Genesis 2:7**, *Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*) The word Jeremiah used from "potter" comes from the word translated "formed" in Genesis 2:7.
  2. It is true before the fall of Adam and is especially true after (**Genesis 3:19**, *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust,*

<sup>1</sup> Ryken, Philip Graham. *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001.

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*and to dust you shall return.”*

3. Recognition of the “Dustiness of Man.” From Shakespeare in Hamlet to the music group Kansas, “*Dust in the Wind*,” who sings the lyric, “*all we are is dust in the wind*.” To Star Trek, where humans are referred to as “carbon units.” To the cemetery: Ashes to Ashes; dust to dust.
4. The potter can do whatever he wants to with the clay “***Until men are brought to know that they are so subject to God’s power that their condition can in a single moment be changed, according to his will, they will never be humble as they ought to be.***”<sup>2</sup>
5. The mistake of pride is believing God is bound to us in blessing only.

### III. The Potter’s Right over the Clay (Jeremiah 18:4b,7-10)

- A. Humanity cannot be exalted at the expense of deity (**Isaiah 29:16**, *You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me”; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?*)
- B. The verses mean more than “*God isn’t finished with me yet.*” Jeremiah’s message is one of judgment. The picture of the potter is not meant to comfort us but to warn us of judgment.
  1. Paul expands our understanding of the Potter, **Romans 9:20–24**, *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”* **21** *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*
  2. **2 Timothy 2:20**, *Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.*

### IV. The Revelation of the Nature of the Clay (Jeremiah 18:11-17)

- A. Israel’s disobedience mounts higher and higher. (Jeremiah 18:11-12)
  1. **Jeremiah 2:25**, *Keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst. But you said, ‘It is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go.’*
  2. Israel (and people) has forgotten (forsaken) God (Jeremiah 18:13-15). It is “the slide” into punishment. **Deuteronomy 32:35**, *Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.*
- B. Israel forsaking God and His commandments is like:
  1. It is a freak of nature (Jeremiah 18:13-17)
  2. As strange as a bride who forgot her wedding dress (**Jeremiah 2:32**, *Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.*)
- C. The Desire to silence the prophet (**Jeremiah 18:18**, *Then they said, “Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words.”*)

### V. The Clay is a Work in Progress

- A. You are the clay, and that’s it.
- B. As a defective pot, we must be made new.
- C. In the new life, God must be trusted & obeyed.
  1. Adelaide Pollard (1862–1934) wrote a hymn for willing clay, the kind of clay that stays on the wheel to be shaped in the Potter’s hands:

<i>Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!</i>	<i>Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!</i>
<i>Thou art the potter; I am the clay.</i>	<i>Hold o’er my being absolute sway!</i>
<i>Mold me and make me after thy will,</i>	<i>Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see</i>
<i>While I am waiting, yielded and still.</i>	<i>Christ only, always, living in me!</i>

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, John, and John Owen. *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.

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**Pain hurts and we want it to stop.**

**Fear of the unknown outcomes.**

**Jealousy, we want what God has not ordained for us.**

**Fairness, life is not fair, and we want fairness.**

**Love, if God is so loving; the pain would not be present.**

**God does not coddle our fears with false promises...**

- The Word of the Lord in the Old Testament was/is perhaps more than we could ever imagine. The Word of the Lord was meant to be seen with the eyes and heard with the ears, and there are several examples of this in Scripture:
  - Abraham and the word of the Lord (Gen 15:1,17)
  - Samuel and the word of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:1, 4, 21)
  - Jeremiah and the word of the Lord (Jeremiah 1:4-5, 9)
  - **John 1:1–2, 14**, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

D.

E. What verdict would God give on your life?

1. Do we forget God in our daily life?
2. Do we establish our own righteousness rather than pursuing Christ's righteousness?
3. Do we rebel against the Lordship of Christ when given clear instructions & commands?
4. Do we add any other "gods" in our life (money, positions, fame, stuff)?
5. Do you love God like a newly married bride?