I. Lessons from the Potter, 18-20

1. **18:1-12—the allegory of the potter:**

2. **18:13-17—Israel’s ignoring God produces the same from him:**

3. **18:18-23—Jeremiah’s fourth lament:** his enemies plot against Jeremiah because of his attacks against the leaders (cf. 2:8; 8:8). Jeremiah defends himself and prays to God for the merciless and total destruction of these people and their families.

4. **19:1-20:6—public persecution of Jeremiah:**
   a. **19:1-2:** Jeremiah buys a pot and goes to the Potsherd Gate.
   b. **19:3-9:** He condemns the people for forsaking the Lord and for offering children to Baal. Making a play on the Hebrew word “jug” (נְבֶקָה, baqbuq, 1, 10), God says through Jeremiah, “I will make this place void” (יִבָּקְו, ubaqqtî).
   c. **19:10-15:** Jerusalem, the idol worshiping city will be broken like the jug was broken, irreparably smashed.
   d. **20:1-6:** To silence Jeremiah, Pashhur, the temple policeman, struck Jeremiah and placed him in stocks. Upon his release (v. 3) Jeremiah names Pashur “Terror-all-around,” for that will be his lot; he and his family will share the fate of the doomed city (cf. Amos 7).

5. **20:7-13, 14-18—fifth and sixth laments:**
   a. **7-9:** For these events Jeremiah almost blasphemously accuses God of deceiving him and exerting irresistible power over him. Yet Jeremiah cannot refrain from preaching.
   b. **10-13:** With opponents plotting his fall, Jeremiah has confidence in God protection, using excerpts from hymns (cf. Pss 6:9-10; 31:3; 109:30; 140:12-13)
c. **14-18:** Jeremiah curses his own existence (cf. 15:10; Job 3).

(1) Has correspondence to Jer 20:14-18, Gen 1-2, and Job 3
Job 3
(1) Afterward, Job began to speak and cursed the day of his birth. (2) Job spoke and said: (3) Perish the day on which I was born, and the night it was announced, "A male has been conceived!" (4) May that day be darkness; May God above have no concern for it; May light not shine on it; (5) May darkness and deep gloom look after it; May a pall lie over it; May what blackens the day terrify it. (6) May obscurity carry off that night; May it not be counted among the days of the year; May it not appear in any of its months; (7) May that night be desolate; May no sound of joy be heard in it; (8) May those who cast spells upon the day damn it, those prepared to disable Leviathan; (9) May its twilight stars remain dark; May it hope for light and have none May it not see the glimmerings of the dawn--(10) Because it did not block my mother's womb, and hide trouble from my eyes. (11) Why did I not die at birth, expire as I came forth from the womb? (12) Why were there knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck? (13) For now would I be lying in repose, asleep and at rest, (14) With the world's kings and counselors who build ruins for themselves, (15) Or with the nobles who possess gold and who fill their houses with silver (16) Or why was I not like a buried stillbirth, like babies who never saw the light? (17) There the wicked cease from troubling; there rest those whose strength is spent.(18) Prisoners are wholly at ease; they do not hear the taskmaster's voice.(19) Small and great alike are there, and the slave is free of his master.

Jer 20:14-18
(14) Cursed be the day I was born! The day my mother bore me, let it not be blessed; (15) Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you," making him glad. (16) Let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, (17) because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb for ever great (18) Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

Gen 1 & 2
(2) The earth was a wasteless void, and darkness was on the face of the deep (3-4) God said, "Let there be light"...God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness (5) God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. (7) And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. (14) And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament...to separate the day from the night; let them be for signs and seasons and days and years" (21) So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature which moves (15-16) Let there be lights in...the heavens...to give light on the earth; he made the stars also (26) Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (2:2-3) God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it
(2) Job vs. Jeremiah—Verses compared:

- (a) 14 = Job 3:3a
- (b) 15 = Job 3:3bb
- (c) 16 similar to Job 3:7,8
- (d) 17 = Job 3:10
- (e) 18 = Job 3:11

(3) The differences, though seemingly insignificant, are really important.

Both men curse the day of their birth. Both suffer from “trouble” (‘amâl; Job 3:10; Jer 20:18) and “sorrow” (yâgôn; Jer 20:18; cf. Job 3:20). Although both bear their burden in obedience to God, they desire to be freed from their painful agony. In contrast to Job, Jeremiah had been forewarned by God that he would experience persecution from his fellow countrymen for preaching a message of doom (Jer 1:17-19). Both sought relief in cursing the day of their origin. The self-curse in Job is more intricately developed. It is cast in the the style of reverse magic (Hartley, 88)

(4) Also, Jeremiah primarily curses the one who brought the news of his birth whereas Job curses the day itself.

B. Oracles from the time of Zedekiah, 21-24:

1. 21:1-10—Oracle against Zedekiah:

   a. 1-7: Cf. 37:1-10. Both accounts, though similar, describe separate events. Pashhur, the son of Malchiah, appears also in ch. 38. Zephaniah the priest was executed at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar (52:24-27)

   b. 8-10: “the way of life and the way of death”—the only possibility for life was surrender, but Jerusalem would be destroyed, 38:17.

2. 21:11-23:8—Oracles concerning the royal house:
21:11-12: The king was to administer justice (1 Kgs 3:9; Ps 72:1-4). Doing evil brought God’s wrath.

21:13-14: God would punish Jerusalem, who considered herself invulnerable.

22:1-5: This is an expansion of 21:11-12. Cf. 22:3 with 21:12. If the people repent, their destruction will be averted and the Davidic dynasty preserved.

22:6-7: Similar to 21:13-14. Punishment will take the form of foresters who turn forests into wasteland.

22:8-9: The reaction of the nations when they see the destruction of the city—“Because they abandoned the covenant, God destroyed them.”

3. 22:10-30—Oracles concerning Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin:

22:10-12: The dead Josiah was better of than his son Shallum (i.e., Jehoahaz, 1 Chr 3:15), who in 609 was banished to Egypt by Neco (2 Kgs 23:33-34; 2 Chr 36:1-4; Ezek 19:4).

22:13-19: Jehoiakim condemned for expanding the palace instead of doing justice and righteousness. Jehoiakim should have emulated his father, Josiah. He will die unburied outside the city gates (36:30; 2 Kgs 24:1-5)

22:20-23: Lamentations will arise from the highest peaks over Jerusalem’s destruction. The authors of these laments will be her allies (lovers, 3:1) and leaders (shepherds, 23:1)

22:24-30: Jehoiachin punishment is described in terms of childlessness, a prophecy that destroys the theory of premillennialism.

4. 23:1-8—A Messianic Oracle: After condemning the religious leaders for scattering the sheep, God states that he will establish a righteous member (branch, Isa 11:1; Zech 3:8) of David’s line over restored Israel. This
branch will rule responsibly over God’s people as king (Isa 9:2-7), and not as the puppet.

5. 23:9-40—Oracles concerning the prophets:

a. 9-12: the delinquency of both priest and prophet distresses Jeremiah greatly. Supposedly guardians of Israel’s faith, they will be destroyed by their own devices.

b. 13-15: Their words are worse than Baal’s prophets and their deeds worse than those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

c. 16-22: Exhortation not to listen to these individuals. They speak their own mind, not God’s. They do not speak God’s mind because they have not stood in council, cf. 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Isa 6:1-7; 40:1-2; Amos 3:7.

d. 23-32: God’s omnipresence precludes his being unaware of the false prophets misleading. Also commentary and application of Deuteronomy 13:1ff.

e. 33-40: Commentary and application of Deuteronomy 18:15ff. The point being in these as well as vv. 23-32 that God would give the prophets the words to say. They were not to receive it from anywhere else.

6. 24:1-10—Baskets of figs: represent those remaining in Judah and Egypt after 597 who smugly assumed (bad figs) that they were favored (good figs). They were actually objects of God’s wrath, 29:15-19; Ezek 11:14-15. But the exiles would be returned (29:10-14) and become a faithful nation while the others will be destroyed.

C. The Babylonian Exile, 25-29

1. 25:1-14—Babylon, God Instrument for Punishment: This section is the conclusion to Jeremiah’s memoirs (36:1-4) written after Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over Necho in June, 605. Jeremiah’s message and warnings to Judah are about to be fulfilled. The foe from the north (cf. 1:14ff; 6:1) will devastate the apostate land. Normal life will vanish. None of this faithless generation will see restoration 70 years later (cf. v. 12; Num
14:20-24). Though Judah will be punished for her sins via Babylon, Babylon will also will be punished for its sins.

2. **25:15-38–The Cup of Wrath:** The cup in this vision is represents God’s judgment upon all nations. The judgment is described via a multiplicity of terms.
   
a. **25:30-31:** Roaring, court language, etc.

b. **25:32-33:** Warfare and/or natural disasters produce innumerable slain (of God) which will not be buried, but rot on the ground.

c. **25:34-38:** The destruction will be like that of the flock (nations) when devastated by a lion (Nebuchadnezzar/God?), which leaves the shepherds desperate.

3. **26:1-35:19–Predictions of Exile and Restoration:**

a. **26:1-24–The Temple Sermon:** The sermon proper (7:1-15) was probably delivered during the Festival of Booths (Sept-Oct 609).

   (1) **1-6:** Is a summary of the sermon of 7:1-15. As already noted, it lays out options for the people–the invitation comes first.

   (2) **26:7-19:** Account of Jeremiah’s arrest and release. The frequently criticized by Jeremiah (priest and prophet 2:8; 5:30-31; 6:13-14), bring charges against Jeremiah, seeking his death. The royal officials assemble to hear the case. Jeremiah’s defense wins his release. The decision is based on that of the prophet Micah (Mic 3:12), who, when he prophesied that Jerusalem would be plowed as a field, was not punished by King Hezekiah.

   (3) **26:20-24:** Martyrdom of Uriah illustrates Jeremiah’s personal danger which was somewhat alleviated due to the official support of Ahikam.

b. **27:1-28:17–The Yoke of the King of Babylon:** was imposed by God on Judah and her neighbors (21:1-10; 32:3-5). So any plans at
rebellion was rebellion against God’s will. Secular history records that Nebuchadnezzar’s army revolted December 595-January 594 in conjunction with the accession in Egypt of Psametichus II (594). Zedekiah may not have carried out the rebellion due to Jeremiah’s influence, which resulted in Judah being spared Nebuchadnezzar’s punitive campaign later that year. Jeremiah’s symbolic act with the yoke was to illustrate graphically the message he proclaimed.

(1) **27:12-15:** Jeremiah repeats the warning in an attempt to counterbalance the influence of false prophets (v. 16ff)

(2) **27:16-22:** Jeremiah cautions the priests and people against believing the false message that the temple booty would soon be returned. Rather they should pray that what they have should not be taken away also (52:17; 2 Kgs 25:13)

(3) **28:1-17:** Hananiah, one of the false prophets, predicted that the captivity would end in two years (3), breaking the yoke Jeremiah was wearing (10). The result was that Hananiah died within the year (16-17). This illustrates that prophecy is more than prediction. It is the unleashing of the creative word of God. Had Hananiah kept his mouth shut, he would have lived longer.

c. **29:1-32—Jeremiah’s Letters to Babylon.**

(1) **29:1-23:** Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles to counter the false message (identical to that which Hananiah, etc., were preaching) which the exiles were receiving. Jeremiah explained that the captivity was going to be much longer. They therefore should settle in for the long haul. The prediction of the execution of Ahab and Zedekiah would only serve to brand Jeremiah as a traitor.

(2) **29:24-32—Jeremiah and Shemaiah:** Shemaiah, a colleague of Hananiah, writes a scathing letter to the temple overseer, Zephaniah (not the prophet), charging him with not doing his job, implying that Jeremiah is crazy. He says to Zephaniah, “The Lord has made you priest instead of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of Yhwh, over every
madman who prophesies (lēkol-ʾiš mēšuggāʾ ūmitnabbē”) to put him in stocks and collar” (v. 26, RSV). This statement has mēšuggāʾ and mitnabbē in hendiadys. The connection is directly made between those who prophesy and madness. The reference to mad prophets is general, but it paves the way for a complaint about Zephaniah’s failure to control Jeremiah in particular, as verses 27-28 indicate. It is clear that the remark about “mad prophets” is primarily directed against Jeremiah and his message to the exiles. Shemaiah takes it for granted that some prophets are mad and need to be controlled, and implies that Jeremiah is one of them. He does not charge Jeremiah with madness directly; instead he insinuates it, in typical bureaucratic fashion, by reminding Zephaniah of his responsibility to control such people. He takes it for granted that some of those who prophesy are in fact mad, and evidently assumes that Zephaniah will be of the same opinion. Wilson concludes that “Shemaiah did not recognize Jeremiah’s prophetic authority and interpreted his typical possession behavior as an indication of madness.”¹ That may be so; certainly Shemaiah believed that Jeremiah was vulnerable to the accusation. There were certainly individuals who were mad, but had no connection with prophecy. On the other hand there were individuals who prophesied but were not mad. But Shemaiah is concerned with those who are mad and who prophesy. It serves his purpose to remind Zephaniah of his responsibility to arrest “every madman who prophesies.” He comes rather close to a formal accusation, but he insinuates it, and does not make it directly. This insinuation is not a rejection of prophets, nor is it a rejection of madmen; rather it is a rejection of (supposed?) madmen who attempt to prophesy. Therefore, the phrase is an attempt to weaken the power of Jeremiah through slander. It is an attempt to discredit the prophet and restrain him. One could put Shemaiah’s complaint this way: “Since you are responsible to arrest every madman who prophesies, why do you allow Jeremiah to continue?”

¹Ibid., 247.