

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CLAY-POTTER IMAGERY IN THE BIBLE:
THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
FOR DAILY CHRISTIAN LIFE

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Karl Alan Stelzer

Lynchburg, Virginia

March, 2013

Copyright © 2013 by Karl A. Stelzer
All Rights Reserved

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

GRADE

MENTOR: Dr. Charlie N. Davidson
Director – Doctor of Ministry Program
Assistant Professor of Counseling

READER: Dr. David W. Hirschman
Associate Dean
Assistant Professor of Religion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my wife, Debbie, who has patiently and persistently by my side in ministry and typed the various drafts of this thesis.

Thank you to my daughter-in-law, Becky, for proofreading of the text and her expertise in addressing grammar and formatting issues.

Thank you to Becky Bucy for proofreading and assisting in the technical formatting of the Bibliography.

Thank you to Dan Hoeflinger for his technical assistance in the computer formatting of my thesis.

Thank you to Dr. Charlie Davidson, my Thesis Mentor, and Dr. David Hirschman, my Thesis Reader, for their expertise and encouragement in the completion of this project.

Thank you to family, colleagues, and friends for their unceasing prayers on my behalf while completing D.Min. course work and this thesis project.

Thank you to my professors at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary for your input into my life and ministry through the various D.Min. classes I took over the past two years.

ABSTRACT

CLAY-POTTER IMAGERY IN THE BIBLE: THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR DAILY CHRISTIAN LIFE

Karl Alan Stelzer

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, February 2012

Mentor: Dr. Charlie N. Davidson

God, the Master Potter, uses clay-potter imagery to explain spiritual truth. These passages are ignored, explained superficially, or misinterpreted and have not had the divinely intended impact. Theologically, doctrines of Theology Proper, Bibliology, and Anthropology have been compromised. Practically, the Holy Spirit has been hindered.

To demonstrate the need for clay-potter instruction, research will include a comparative analysis of information gathered through questionnaires to churches that have held a clay-potter conference and those that have not, and an examination of written material and popular presentations. This author combines professional pottery expertise and biblical training to present accurate exposition.

This thesis vindicates God as Master Potter, sensitive and skilled in working with man, recovers the integrity of Scripture's use of the clay-potter metaphor, and provides a balanced view of man, mere clay but fashioned by God. Practically, this thesis frees the Holy Spirit to use the clay-potter metaphor in believers' lives.

Number of words: 150

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.....	2
INTRODUCTION	3
Statement of Importance and Purpose of Research	4
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Special Terminology	8
Statement of Limitations.....	10
Theoretical Basis for the Project.....	10
Statement of Methodology.....	11
Review of the Literature	14
CHAPTER 1. ASSESSMENT OF THE CLAY-POTTER KNOWLEDGE OF INDIVIDUALS IN CHURCHES	25
CHAPTER 2. ASSESSMENT OF FORMAL LITERATURE	45
CHAPTER 3. ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR LITERATURE.....	59
CHAPTER 4. SUMMARY OF PROBLEM AND PROPOSED SOLUTION	73
CHAPTER 5. MODEL PASSAGE: EXPOSITION OF JEREMIAH 18–19.....	94
APPENDIX A	109
APPENDIX B	121
APPENDIX C	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY	144
VITA.....	155
IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER.....	156

TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

Table 1 Group A's Answers to the Questionnaire	29
Table 2 Group B's Answers to the Questionnaire	30

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 Question One: Group A Answers.....	31
Figure 2 Question One: Group B Answers	31
Figure 3 Group A: Correct Answer Compared to Composite Incorrect Answers	31
Figure 4 Group B: Composite Incorrect Answers Compared to Correct Answer	31
Figure 5 Question Two: Group A Answer.....	32
Figure 6 Question Two: Group B Answer	32
Figure 7 Group A: Correct Answer Compared to Composite Incorrect Answers	33
Figure 8 Group B: Composite Incorrect Answers Compared to Correct Answer	33
Figure 9 Question Three: Group A Answers	34
Figure 10 Question Three: Group B Answers	34
Figure 11 Group A: Correct Answer Compared to Composite Incorrect Answers	35
Figure 12 Group B: Composite Incorrect Answers Compared to Correct Answer	35
Figure 13 Question Four: Group A.....	36
Figure 14 Question Four: Group B	36
Figure 15 Question Six: Group A	36
Figure 16 Question Six: Group B	36
Figure 17 Comparison of Group A's and Group B's Answers to Questions 4 and 6.....	37
Figure 18 "Slow Wheel"	79
Figure 19 "Fast Wheel"	79

INTRODUCTION

As a professional potter of nearly forty years and a trained student-teacher of the Word of God, the writer has been blessed with unique insights into specific passages of God's Word, namely the clay-potter metaphors. The multifaceted relationship of the potter to the clay provides a significant contribution to both theological and practical truth. Many of these insights have been shared in previous ministries both to youth and adults over the past decades.

After several years of the Bible and pottery occupying distinct areas of this writer's life, in the mid-eighties he realized that he should share the multiple insights that the pottery brought to the Scriptures. The relationships of the Bible and pottery are not accidental but divinely planned. The relationship discovered in personal study and observation should be shared in a formal ministry context. Since then, this writer has had the privilege of communicating the clay-potter life changing truths with both young people and adults. Preaching-teaching demonstrations and conferences have been conducted at Christian camps, schools, and many churches as well as Christian college chapels.

God's Word is a unique and wonderful book full of a variety of means to communicate its life-changing message. Man has a variety of life experiences as well, but not all men have the same life experiences. Thus, not all men can relate to the same degree to the Bible's wide variety of metaphorical language. For example, for the past several decades Christians have been blessed and encouraged in specific areas of Christian growth through the unique insights Philip Keller, a writer and shepherd, gives to key shepherd-sheep passages, specifically Psalm 23.

Unlocking and explaining the fullness of Scripture is important. This is not reading into the passage or metaphor but fully explaining the basic and implicit truth from each metaphor. This truth is at the foundation of this thesis. The key clay-potter passages hold much for us

Christians to learn and apply. Learning and application must come from the Scripture itself as intended by the Holy Spirit through the original writers if it is going to have the dynamic God designed as when His revelation of truth was given.

Stewardship is a key concept in biblical revelation. What a man has been given, he is accountable before God to use for His honor and glory. God has specifically prescribed this writer's being and life experiences. Within that plan He has brought together an art training alongside Bible training. This is His investment into the life of this writer. Ministry is doing for God in accordance to what God has done in one's life. Sharing the insights of the clay-potter passages is not an option; it is a responsibility to the end that His people are encouraged and helped in their personal lives in a practical way.

This thesis presents an evaluation of the knowledge of the average church person of the clay-potter passages in the Bible and an examination of the written material and popular presentations of these clay-potter passages. The result is the foundation for a study tool focusing on the divinely intended meaning and principles of this important biblical metaphor. By this, the church will be encouraged and challenged to be both thankful and dependent upon God's working as Master Potter in and through the day to day life of each believer.

Statement of Importance and Purpose of Research

God is the Master Potter, and in His Word uses clay-potter imagery to explain spiritual truth. This author has observed that these passages are often ignored, explained superficially, or misinterpreted. Those who have theological training but lack technical pottery knowledge erroneously handle the clay-potter metaphor. Christian potters, who lack formal biblical training, handle these passages incorrectly often relying on personal experience which replaces sound

Bible exposition. This author combines professional pottery expertise and biblical training to present accurate and practical exposition.

The church has failed to recognize and apply the essential truths of the clay-potter passages. Therefore these passages have not had the divinely intended personal impact upon the church's spiritual health and outreach. Theologically, the doctrines of Theology Proper, Bibliology, and Anthropology have been compromised. Practically, the Holy Spirit has been hindered in producing spiritual growth from this important metaphor.

This thesis examines key clay-potter passages to correct misunderstandings and provide additional explanation. In addition, a foundation is laid for a study tool for individual Christians to ascertain and apply the divinely intended principles of clay-potter imagery passages. This thesis vindicates God as Master Potter, sensitive and skilled in His working with man. The integrity of Scripture is recovered as it accurately uses the clay-potter metaphor. This thesis provides a balanced view of man, he is mere clay but fashioned by God as a vessel of honor to bring glory to Him.

Practically, this thesis will free the Holy Spirit to use the clay-potter metaphor, not in spite of man's erroneous explanation, but through man's proper exposition and application of these passages. This working of the Holy Spirit through the accurate treatment of this frequently used metaphor produces spiritual growth and fruit in individual lives.

Statement of the Problem

God often uses metaphors from everyday life to communicate His divine truth. "God's Word abounds with, Metaphors, Allegories, and Other Trophies and Figures of speech. Similitudes or Metaphors are borrowed from visible things, to display and illustrate the excellent

nature of invisible things.”¹ Biblical metaphors are found both in the Old and New Testaments and are of great significance in Christ’s life and teaching evidenced in the Gospel record. Using metaphors to illustrate and explain material involves a simple yet foundational principle of learning, apperception. Apperception is defined as “the process of understanding by which newly observed qualities of an object are related to past experience.”² Learning is a movement of understanding from the known to the unknown, the familiar to the new, and in the case of divine truth often from the physical-material realm to the spiritual realm. Many illustrative and explanatory themes reoccur throughout the Word of God. One of these is the clay-potter imagery, or metaphor, and is found in both the Old and New Testaments.

In relationship to the various clay-potter imagery passages, there are two problems. First, for various reasons, these metaphorical passages are often ignored. Two examples from separate generations ignore the clay-potter metaphor. The first example is Benjamin Keach, a powerful preacher and defender of Baptist doctrine in the second half of the seventeenth century (1640–1704). Keach not only introduced the practice of singing hymns in worship but was an influential author.³ His book, *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible*, a classic for many generations, is quite extensive (over one thousand pages) and very thorough, defining and interpreting nearly every type or metaphor used in the Bible. Oddly, the clay-potter metaphor is absent. The fifty-two page chapter on metaphors of God the Father includes detailed interpretation of every conceivable metaphor but addresses nothing related to God as Potter.⁴

¹ Benjamin Keach, *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1972), viii.

² *The American Heritage College Dictionary*. 5th ed. s.v. “apperception.”

³ Keach, *Preaching from the Types*, vii. Keach, a prolific author, wrote forty-three different works in his lifetime.

A second example of ignoring the clay-potter metaphor from another generation (mid-twentieth century) is Bullinger's work, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*. Although considered one of the standard works in this area of study, not one reference, explanation, or comment on God as Potter is found within its over one thousand pages.⁵ Two classic works from two distinct generations make no mention of this widely used metaphor.

Second, when dealt with, clay-potter passages are often treated either inaccurately or in a superficial manner. Many individuals who deal with specific clay-potter passages, whether commentators, Bible teachers, or preachers, are unaware of the background, culture, or technical nuances of the imagery foundational to this metaphorical biblical material.⁶ Such a lack of general awareness of the potter-craftsman typical in our industrialized society was not a problem in biblical times. "Pottery making was a common activity in the Near East, and Jeremiah would readily have appreciated the lessons to be learned from the potter."⁷ Added to the fact of familiarity, "it was a regular feature of the prophetic ministry to find the word of Yahweh in the simple events of daily life."⁸ Therefore the key clay-potter passages that did come out of the everyday biblical culture need to be reexamined. As a professional potter, the writer brings to

⁴ Extensive indexes, both scriptural and topical, make it easy to verify this omission in Keach's book. Not even one reference is listed for the passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah which clearly make the connection of God as the Potter and man as the clay.

⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (N.d., Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968). Oddly enough in one of the key clay-potter passages, Isaiah 64:8, there is a brief comment on "God as Father" but no mention at all of "God as Potter" on page 892.

⁶ R. H. Johnston, "Potter, Pottery," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1986), 3:919. One example is found in reference to Jeremiah 18:4 when the potter has to rework the clay because it is marred. The two suggestions of the specific problem given are 1) the clay becomes too wet, or 2) it gets off center and flies off the wheel head, are not plausible reasons if a true potter-craftsman is working on the wheel. The marring of the clay is likely due to a foreign substance.

⁷ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1980), 432.

⁸ Ibid.

bear on these passages the intended understanding and resulting theological and practical implications by the original writers of Scripture.

Arguably God chose the clay-potter imagery as a key metaphor to illumine specific vital truth. The clay-potter imagery surfaces first in the creation account of Genesis 1–2. In Genesis 2:7 God chose the very verb יצר meaning “to form, make, fashion.” It is used in its participial form in Jeremiah and Isaiah denoting the potter. It is “used of potters making vessels of clay, also of the formation of man, to denote the care and skill of the Almighty in the formation of the human body.”⁹ This imagery through God’s progressive plan of revelation is specifically developed and used by many of the writers of Scripture such as, Moses (Gen. 2), Job (Job 10, 13, 33), David (Psa.), Isaiah (Isa. 29, 45, 64), Jeremiah (Jer. 18–19), Paul (Rom. 9–11, 2 Cor. 4, 2 Tim. 2), Peter (1 Pet. 1, 4, 5), and John (Rev. 2). Speaking of the Jeremiah 18–19 passage, commentator Feinberg says, “In this passage we have a true but mysterious blending of the divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Lord used the potter to illustrate how He deals with humanity.”¹⁰ This thesis examines and applies God’s choice metaphor to clarify its teaching and provide instruction and application for daily Christian life.

Special Terminology

Ten concepts need defined in order to provide a clear understanding of this thesis:

⁹ William Wilson, *New Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987), 175.

¹⁰ Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:490. In addition to Feinberg’s assessment, many others state that these passages address both divine sovereignty and human responsibility: John Bright, *Jeremiah*, vol. 21 of *Anchor Bible*, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 125; Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1988), 160–161; Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victory Books, 1985), 1152–53; John Guest, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The Communicator’s Commentary, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 144; C. F. Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 8 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. by David Patrick and James Kennedy (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1973), 292–93, 295.

- 1) *Clay-potter*.¹¹ This writer is using this term as a reference to those passages in the Bible that rely upon or develop the potter and/or clay metaphor to communicate divine truth.¹²
- 2) *Master potter*. A master potter is an accomplished trained skilled potter (not one who simply has had a couple ceramics classes). God is the ultimate Master Potter.
- 3) *Clay*. Clay is a fine decomposed granite-type rock. The Bible uses multiple words translated as “dust,” “clay,” or “mire” (mud).
- 4) *Greenware*. Greenware is pottery that has not been fired at all.
- 5) *Bisque ware*. Bisque ware is pottery that has an initial low temperature firing prior to a subsequent higher temperature firing.
- 6) *Throwing*. Throwing is a method by which the potter fashion vessels on a potter’s wheel.
- 7) *Kiln*. A kiln, a furnace or oven made of refractory materials, is used to fire (exposure to heat to mature and strengthen) ceramic vessels.
- 8) *Formal literature*. Formal literature is peer-review or traditional literature such as commentaries, journal articles, Bible study encyclopedias, or dictionaries. Also included in the category is peer-review literature in the discipline of pottery or ceramics. Academic is an excellent alternate designation.
- 9) *Popular literature*. Popular literature is written or media material that is non-academic and available and understandable to the average person. Popular literature includes devotional books, VHS tapes, DVDs, and Internet material. Non-academic is an excellent alternate designation.
- 10) *Theological training*. Theological training is graduate Bible training in a recognized degree program.

¹¹ The Hebrew word for *potter* is יצר. The Greek word for *potter* is κεραμευς.

¹² Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 56–57. Some of these passages are even designated as parables. Examples are – “The Parable of the Potter and the Clay” – Jeremiah 18:1–10 and “The Parable of the Broken Bottle” – Jeremiah 19:1–13.

Statement of Limitations

The key clay-potter Scripture text that is the primary focal point of this thesis is Jeremiah 18 and 19. Other clay-potter passages dealt with specifically are placed in an appendix. The outcome of this thesis is an examination of key clay-potter passages to correct misunderstandings and provide additional explanation. The final result of this thesis is a foundation for a study tool to ascertain and apply the divinely intended principles of clay-potter passages to everyday Christian life.

Theoretical Basis for the Project

This writer approaches this study with a specific theological perspective. This perspective is generally referred to as biblical, conservative, and fundamental. Specifically in the area of Bibliology, the Word of God is inspired of God; therefore the words of Scripture are totally authentic and authoritative. The very words of Scripture, including those pertinent to the clay-potter metaphor, are accurate, complete, and precise. The Scripture given is also regarded as totally sufficient; therefore, it is 100% adequate. Nothing more or different is needed to live the Christian life. Finally, the Bible is a practical book. It is not a book of theory but rather gives specific direction for Christian living; therefore, it must be applied.

The writer is unaware of any treatment of this subject that deals with these passages both in their cultural and biblical contexts. Minimal work on the clay-potter passages has come from a professional standpoint, that is, from someone who has experience and training in pottery and formal Bible training. Most of these writers have primarily an archaeological background and

expertise.¹³ Often that which has been written concerning the clay-potter passages has one or more of several shortcomings. First, the treatment of the passage is done on a surface level and lacks any real exegetical foundation. Second, the treatment is by someone who has a beginning understanding, which is quite limited, in the area of pottery or limited in tools of handling the biblical text.¹⁴ Third, the treatment is done in a “popular” manner that has little or no regard or awareness of accuracy either from a biblical, theological standpoint or technical nuances of clay and it’s forming methods.

Statement of Methodology

Research methodology for this thesis is along two avenues. The first is to assess how much church members have been exposed to and know about clay-potter imagery found in the Bible. The second is to examine the literature and media available on the Bible’s clay-potter imagery. Both of these approaches to the topic should demonstrate the need for further teaching of the Bible’s clay-potter passages.

Chapter One comparatively analyzes the information gathered through questionnaires from churches that have held a clay-potter conference and those that have not. The two groups are not equal, but there is a significant sampling of participants from each group.¹⁵ This researcher must first note that “a common misconception among beginning researchers is that all

¹³ An example is R. H. Johnston who served as art director for *The Biblical Archaeologist* and was also Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts and Director of the School for American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Other examples are H. J. Franken of the University of Leiden in the Netherlands and Bryant G. Wood, editor of *The Bible and the Spade*. Both are archaeologists with some awareness of wheel-thrown pottery-making methods.

¹⁴ One or two classes in pottery or working in a friend’s studio occasionally does not necessarily qualify as an “expert.” Nor does a couple of Bible classes make one a “Bible scholar.” This writer does not claim to be a Bible scholar but is thankful for the training and experience God has allowed.

¹⁵ The data analyzed from the two groups is from 38 churches and over 2,000 individual questionnaires.

groups of respondents must be equal in number in order to make legitimate comparisons of the groups . . . this is not true.”¹⁶ This comparative analysis demonstrates a significant difference in church members’ awareness of clay-potter passages and how accurately they understand and apply these passages. This assessment and evaluation demonstrates how needed are materials that accurately and practically present the full divinely intended teaching of the clay-potter passages.

To assess the knowledge of individuals in churches, the writer contacted pastors of numerous churches and asked to conduct clay-potter Bible conferences at each church. At each conference, this writer demonstrated throwing various pottery vessels on his own portable potter’s wheel. In conjunction with the different demonstrations he presented in-depth teaching from selected Old and New Testament clay-potter passages. At the conclusion of the conference, participants completed the questionnaire and returned it to the pastor. Participants then kept the consent form for their records. Each pastor and church name remains anonymous, and individual questionnaires were not signed. After collection, the completed questionnaires were tabulated and evaluated.

This writer also contacted other church pastors to see if they would be willing to have their congregations participate in the questionnaire. Those willing to participate were sent questionnaires with a cover letter of explanation. These participants also received a consent form and questionnaire from their pastor, and after reading the consent form, completed the questionnaire and returned it to the pastor. They also kept the consent form for their records. The pastor and church names remain anonymous, and individual questionnaires were not signed. After collection, the completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher.

¹⁶ Mildred L. Patten, *Questionnaire Research, A Practical Guide* (Los Angeles: Pyrczak, 1998), 85.

Questionnaire participants were adults (eighteen years and older), both male and female, from any ethnic or socio-economic background and were approximately half from churches that held a clay-potter conference and half from those that did not. After receiving the completed questionnaires, this writer comparatively analyzed the two groups. Each question was restated, analyzed, and evaluated. Charts and tables were created along with a dialogue explanation of the findings. After tables of frequency were prepared, percentage calculations were done.¹⁷ Comparison of distributions of answers was depicted in polygons.¹⁸ A final report of the findings followed the guidelines of *Questionnaire Research* which includes 1) a formal introduction, 2) description of the research method, 3) description of results, and 4) discussion and conclusion of results.¹⁹ After the comparative analysis was completed, questionnaires were secured and after three years will be shredded.

The second avenue of research is an examination of the written and media literature available relative to the clay-potter imagery in the Bible. This examination includes two areas—formal literature and popular literature, including non-printed or media material. Chapter Two addresses the formal literature focusing on the more academic material including commentaries, Bible study materials, and journal articles that deal with or neglect the clay-potter passages. Chapter Three addresses the popular literature that focuses on devotional books and non-printed or media material, such as tapes (audio/video) and DVD electronic presentations. Chapter Four begins with a summary statement of the problem and then suggests a proposed solution concerning proper and full understanding of the clay-potter passages.

¹⁷ Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 85. A major advantage of percentages over frequencies is that two or more groups of unequal size can be compared.

¹⁸ Ibid., 88–89. Polygons are preferred because they permit sets of scores or answers to be superimposed on each other whereas bars of a histogram are generally unsatisfactory.

¹⁹ Ibid., 123–26.

The procedure for this study is as follows. First the writer establishes the cultural context of the clay-potter passages in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) world as a foundation. The difference in philosophy and methodology between Western and “oriental” culture relative to the making of pottery is identified and explained.²⁰ Secondly, the writer lists and categorizes with a brief analysis all possible clay-potter references in both the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate the vast scope of the clay-potter passages in the Old and New Testaments.

Chapter Five is a comprehensive treatment of Jeremiah 18–19 as a model for the proper understanding of the clay-potter passages. This is an exegetical and expositional study of these two chapters including implications and application to daily Christian life. The exegetical and expositional treatment of other selected clay-potter passages is included in the Appendix.

Review of the Literature

Review of the literature relating to the clay-potter passages of the Bible reveals three facts. First, both the formal literature and the popular literature often ignore, explain superficially, or misinterpret the Bible in the area of the clay-potter imagery. This is because those who have theological training often lack technical pottery knowledge while some Christian potters have little or no formal Bible training.

Second, there is helpful information of both theological and technical nature which when synthesized and applied to the clay-potter passages assists in the correct and full understanding. However, often a commentator will identify and explain an aspect of the clay-potter truth but will not pursue its meaning or significance possibly because he lacks confidence or understanding in the professional pottery field.

²⁰ Jack Troy, “Gleanings: A Potter in China,” *Ceramics Monthly*, November, 1996, 46. An example of this is the statement quoted from Daniel Rhodes’ book, *Stoneware and Porcelain*, “If even one Chinese master potter in, say, 1600, could have been shanghaied, taken to Europe and put to work in a pottery, the whole history of Western ceramic art might have been altered.”

Thirdly, this aspect of Bible teaching does not appear to have been handled on either the Ph.D. or D.Min. level. Search of the various electronic databases indicated no recent research has been done on the clay-potter imagery.

The literature review includes the broad biblical context of multiple passages both in the Old and New Testaments that establish the need for such a study. The clay-potter imagery is not an isolated illustration that God chose to illuminate divine truth. To demonstrate the problem within the commentaries and journal literature, this writer uses Jeremiah 18 and 19 to establish the lack of or error in explanation; specifically in Jeremiah 18:4 which says, “Marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it,”²¹ and in Jeremiah’s specific vessel designation, “a potter’s earthen bottle” (*baqbuq*) in Jeremiah 19:1 and 10.

Five primary explanations surface in review of the literature for the marring of the clay in Jeremiah 18:4, only one of which fits both orthodox doctrine and correct understanding of the Master Potter (which includes technical understanding of the craft of pottery making). Each of these five explanations is considered.

The marring of the clay is that the potter’s wheel was going too fast; therefore, the centrifugal force destroyed the vessel. There are two examples of this explanation. Terence E. Fretheim states, “It can be assumed that God is not the reason for the inferior results; it is the clay/people that are corrupt,”²² and later he adds that the adverse effect depended “upon the quality of the clay and the centrifugal forces at work on the potter’s wheel.”²³ William L.

²¹ All Scripture references are from the Authorized Version (KJV).

²²Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 269.

²³Ibid., 270.

Holladay, in his commentary on Jeremiah, also suggests the cause of the marring is due to centrifugal force.²⁴

The marring of the clay in Jeremiah 18 is that the clay was too wet, therefore losing strength and sagging. Among the multiple suggested causes of the blemish in the vessel, Peter C. Craigie includes the clay “began to sag under the weight.”²⁵ Sagging would only occur if the clay was too wet. F. B. Huey, Jr. states just the opposite suggesting the clay’s inferior quality was perhaps not wet enough.²⁶ Too wet or too dry is not the clay’s fault but the potter’s; he prepares the clay.

The problem of forming the vessel was that the potter did not have enough clay for the desired vessel and had to change his mind. H. Freedman, in his commentary on Jeremiah, correctly states the clay was marred “from some defect in the clay.” But then adds, “Or because he had taken too little, the potter suddenly changed his mind, crushed his growing jar instantly into a shapeless mass of mud, and beginning anew, fashioned it into a totally different vessel.”²⁷ R. K. Harrison, in his commentary on Jeremiah, also states one of the possible causes is a defect in size.²⁸

²⁴William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 516.

²⁵ Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr. *Jeremiah 1–25*, vol. 26 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 244.

²⁶ F. B. Huey, Jr. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 180.

²⁷ H. Freedman, *Jeremiah*, Soncino Books of the Bible, ed. A. Cohen (London: Soncino Press, 1992), 125.

²⁸ R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 108.

The marring of the clay is the potter's inability and lack of skill. Another possible cause suggested by Harrison includes defect in design.²⁹ One of Craige's suggested causes is a blemish in the design and shaping.³⁰ Holladay, who labels the whole passage as "very childish,"³¹ summarizes. "This is the lesson of the potter. Some pots turn out fine the first time. Some do not, so the potter changes his tactics. It is a striking presentation of divine sovereignty and human freedom."³² David M. Gosdeck, in his commentary on Jeremiah, questions the potter's skill with his conclusion that "one pot did not take shape. So the potter shaped the clay into a different kind of pot."³³

The vessel's marring is a defect in the clay, specifically foreign material such as a stone, chip of wood, or a piece of hard clay. This is an offered cause by some commentators, but the problem is that they suggest this as one of many possible causes.³⁴ J. A. Thompson, in his commentary on Jeremiah, is correct in stating: "The precise meaning of this verse (v. 4) is crucial to the interpretation."³⁵ He identifies the problem as foreign material within the clay.³⁶

Another aspect of the literature review relates to the specific vocabulary comparison and contrast in Jeremiah 18 and 19. In contrast to Jeremiah 18:3-4 where a generic term is selected

²⁹ Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 108.

³⁰ Craige, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 244.

³¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 514.

³² *Ibid.*, 515.

³³ David M. Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, People's Bible Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 119.

³⁴ Craige, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 244; Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 125; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 269; Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 108; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180.

³⁵ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

for the vessel, Jeremiah 19:1 and 10 indicates a very specific type of vessel. More is intended in the word choice than the simple fact that Jeremiah broke a vessel before the eyes of the secular and religious leadership of his day. The particular vessel Jeremiah was to secure and destroy by smashing was a narrow necked bottle, flask or decanter (*baqbuq*). Keil assists in the significance of this term by giving the root derivation; בַּקֵּב is from בָּקַע meaning “to pour out” and refers to a jar with a narrow neck and to the sound heard when liquid is poured out of it.³⁷ Examining how literature treats the specific details of the text demonstrates that this fact is ignored, superficially explained, or misinterpreted. Much of the literature identifies the difference in word choice from chapter 18 and points out its significance but does not explore the meaning and application of the onomatopoeic word (*baqbuq*).³⁸

Review of the literature not only reveals that many do not understand clay-potter passages but also demonstrates that much positive has been written, both technically and theologically. Technically, clay-potter facts pertaining to equipment, methodology, and skill of the master potter can be ascertained from both Bible study and secular sources. Many of the commentaries and biblical culture resources provide a good understanding of the potter’s kick wheel. At times this is referred to as a fast wheel in contrast to a slow wheel used for refining and decorating.³⁹ King, in his commentary on Jeremiah, gives a date of 1650–1550 B.C.E. for when the fast wheel was used in Syria-Palestine.⁴⁰

³⁷ Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 306.

³⁸ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah I* 25, 256; Dyer, “Jeremiah,” 1153; Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 495; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 271; Philip J. King, *Jeremiah, An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 171; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433. Others simply identify the vessel in Jeremiah 19 as “a clay jar”—Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 125, 127; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180.

³⁹ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah I* 25, 244.

⁴⁰ King, *Jeremiah*, 166.

Two comments that often occur in the commentaries demonstrate the widespread use of the Bible's clay-potter imagery. The first comment is the connection made between the verb and noun forms of the root word for *potter*. "The root word 'potter' used extensively of Yahweh's work. So the image of Yahweh as potter is a well-known metaphor for Jeremiah to use."⁴¹

Thomas E. McComiskey in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* explains:

The basic meaning of the root is "to form," "to fashion." While the word occurs in synonymous parallelism with *bara* "create" and *asa* "make" in a number of passages, its primary emphasis is on the shaping or forming of the object involved. As with many Hebrew words of theological significance, the root *yasar* may be used of human as well as divine agency. When used in its secular sense it occurs most frequently in the participial form meaning "potter," i.e. one who fashions (clay). The word is used in this form frequently in the prophets where "the potter" provides an apt vehicle for the communication of the prophetic message (Isa 29:16; Jer 18:2, 4, 6; Zech 11:13). . . . When used of divine agency, the root refers most frequently to God's creative activity. It describes the function of the divine Potter forming man and beast from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7-8, 19). . . . The participial form meaning "potter" is applied to God in Isa 64:7 where mankind is the work of his hand.⁴²

A second comment pertains to the common awareness of pottery making in the biblical world. Thompson, in his commentary on Jeremiah, adds, "Pottery making was a common activity in the Near East."⁴³ It was a very familiar aspect of daily life in the biblical world and therefore an effective metaphor similar to sheep and shepherds.

Secular sources are of great assistance to verify the actual tools and skills necessary to make pottery in any culture regardless of geography and time. Various articles from *Ceramics*

⁴¹ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah* 1□25, 244.

⁴² *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, S.v. "צַר" by Thomas E. McComiskey.

⁴³ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 432.

Monthly, as well as pottery history and technical textbooks, shed light on the clay-potter imagery the Bible uses.⁴⁴

This writer applauds the desire and effort of many who have provided devotional material from the clay-potter imagery. Some have been more successful than others. Some provide a more direct biblical connection than others. The literature review of the various popular materials available relative to the Bible's clay-potter imagery is intended to demonstrate weak areas not to totally discount the effort and product of well-meaning individuals. This body of literature (books, booklets, videotapes, DVDs, e-books) is intended to be devotional, and there is a place for this. But this writer is advocating that another need must be met, namely accurate Bible exposition drawn directly from the text of Scripture and illustrated by the clay-potter metaphor.

Two examples of popular literature on the clay-potter imagery are devotional books by Phillip Keller and Diana Pavlac Glyer.⁴⁵ Keller's booklet recounts his visit to a frontier potter in Afghanistan, and he shares specific personal insights and reflections related to the clay-potter imagery. Diana Pavlac Glyer's popular devotional book flows out of personal experience and not primarily the Bible content. Glyer begins with her personal studio experience and shares specific meanings of the spiritual picture. Both of these devotionals provide an example of the lack of accuracy.

⁴⁴ Ruth Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970); I. Finkelstein, and N. Na'aman, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988); H. J. Franken, "Analysis of Methods of Potmaking in Archaeology," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (April-July 1971); Rivka Gonen, *Pottery in Ancient Times*, ed. Michael Avi-Yonah (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 1974); I. Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986); Erik Mandaville, "An Arabian Cave Potter," *Ceramics Monthly*, May 1988; Glenn C. Nelson, *Ceramics, A Potter's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971); Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter* (Iola, WI: Krause Publishing, 2000); Marian G. Riebe Ronsheim, "Folk Pottery in Israel," *Ceramics Monthly*, January, 1977; Troy, "Gleanings: A Potter in China".

⁴⁵ Phillip Keller, *In the Master's Hands* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1987); Diana Pavlac Glyer, *Clay in the Potter's Hands* (N.p.: Lindale & Associates, 2011). Two other popular devotionals on the clay-potter imagery are B. J. Nicol, *God's Pottery, Knowing the Potter and the Clay* (N.p.: Xulon Press, 2006) and Teresa Cartwright Baldwin, *I Am Clay, A Personal Journey with God, The Potter* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005).

Lemme's, *The Potter's Talk*, is an example of media material that is very free in clay-potter explanation and application. The sole criterion for her comments is her own personal experience as a potter.

The Parables of the Potter and *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*, two DVD presentations,⁴⁶ were done by skilled potters, who each used their pottery experiences as the foundation and then connected various Bible verses to their pottery experience. In both presentations, a large percentage of biblical principles and truths are arrived at from personal observation and then identified with a particular Bible verse or passage. This is acceptable for devotional applications, but study of the Bible's clay-potter imagery must begin with the divinely intended metaphor to be illustrated by specific aspects of the clay-pottery world.

The biblical context related to the clay-potter passages is quite extensive. This illustration of divine truth is not isolated to one or two passages but surfaces in the very first book of the Bible and extends through the end of the New Testament in Revelation. Thus the clay-potter imagery is one of the key metaphors God chose to illumine vital divine truth. In addition to the usage of the clay-potter imagery in the canonical biblical literature, there is an extensive reference in the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), "So it is with the potter, sitting at his work, turning the wheel with his feet, always engrossed in the task of making up his tally; he moulds the clay with his arm, crouching forward to apply his strength. He concentrates on finishing the glazing, and stays awake to clean out the furnace" (Ecclus. 38:29, 30).

The verb the Holy Spirit chose in Genesis 2:7 is יצר "to form, make, fashion." The participle form of the verb in Isaiah and Jeremiah denotes the potter. God is the potter-sculptor who reached down into the clay of the earth and fashioned man, the vessel in whom God

⁴⁶ The Elna M. Smith Foundation, *The Parables of the Potter*, DVD (Eureka Springs, AR: Clarks Video Group, 1994, transferred to DVD 2004); Joseph R. Greene, *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*, DVD, 2006.

breathed the breath of life making him a living soul or person. Man throughout the Bible is connected with clay and clay vessels,⁴⁷ and it is fitting that the initial passage speaking of God's creation of man uses the clay-potter imagery.

The Psalms use clay-potter imagery to depict God's involvement in the salvation and sanctification of the individual (Psa. 40:1□2). The clay-potter metaphor is also present in Psalm 45:18 and Psalm 95:5. Psalm 139 by implication speaks of each individual being fearfully and wondrously made with each detail prescribed. Job, another Old Testament poetic book, uses the clay-potter imagery when Job acknowledges God as the Master Potter who made him and that he was from clay and would return to clay (Job 10:9; 13:12; 33:6).

The Prophets refer to the clay-potter imagery numerous times to explain and illustrate God's warning and message to Israel. Isaiah makes several usages of this metaphor (Isa. 29:16; 45:9), using the clay-potter imagery to illustrate man's foolishness in questioning the ways of the Lord. Isaiah 64:8 is the key passage in the entire Bible that identifies God as the potter and man as the clay.

God used the clay-potter imagery to impress both Israel and the nations with the seriousness of His chastening and judgment. In Isaiah 30:14 God informs rebellious Israel, who sought Egypt for help rather than the Lord, that He was going to chasten them as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken. The potter treading the clay (Isa. 41:25), stomping it, and mixing it with his feet in the clay pit uses the clay-potter imagery to depict chastening upon the idol-worshipping heathen whom He used to chasten Israel. The one raised from the north, from the rising sun, namely Cyrus, will be God's instrument to tread Israel's enemy, Babylon.

⁴⁷ Examples include Gen. 3:19; Job 10:9; 13:12; 30:19; 33:6; 34:15; Psa. 103:14; Eccl. 3:20; 12:7; Isa. 64:8; Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thes. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 3:7.

Jeremiah uses the clay-potter imagery extensively in chapters 18 and 19. The pliable clay in chapter 18 is contrasted with a hardened clay vessel in chapter 19. “The image of the shattered vessel that cannot be repaired is striking. It carries the potter image to another level.”⁴⁸ “As long as the clay was plastic, the potter could remake the vessel as he desired. However, once the vessel has been fired, it cannot be remade.”⁴⁹

The New Testament also uses the clay-potter imagery. Paul in Romans parallels the thought of Isaiah, it is foolish for man (clay) to question God (potter) (Rom. 9:20□21). In the context, Israel may have been questioning God’s dealing with her as a nation. The question raised and answered in Romans 3:1□2 pertaining to the advantage, or benefit, of the Jew in light of the church is further developed in Romans 9□11. God chose Israel, but presently rejected her, or set her aside. and grafted in the church. God is not finished using Israel as His vessel to bless the world and will reinstate her to the place of prominence. God is in control and His ways should not be questioned (Rom. 9:20□21).

The privileged position of believers as earthen vessels is set forth in 2 Corinthians 4:7. The Corinthian church, once plagued with problems, had heeded God’s warning and instruction through Paul and now was encouraged spiritually. They, with Paul, had the treasure of the Gospel and the Word of God in them as ordinary clay pots.

Paul also uses the clay-potter imagery in 2 Timothy 2 among multiple portraits of the believer. The believer is not only an athlete, soldier, husbandman, and servant but also a vessel of honor (2 Tim. 2:20□21). God has a great variety of vessels in His household, some costly (gold and silver) and some more common (wood and earthen/clay), but all are cleansed, purified, and consecrated and thus vessels of honor.

⁴⁸ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1* □25, 256.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 261.

1 Peter focuses on how God refines and strengthens the believer through the fiery furnace of life. The details of the explanation of this divinely orchestrated process are understood most clearly from the clay-potter imagery, specifically clay fired in a kiln. More is being accomplished than purifying (smelting furnace for metals) but also a strengthening (pottery kiln). The three following specific truths related to this process are set forth: 1) trials are good and profitable (1 Pet. 1:7), 2) trials are common (1 Pet. 4:12), and 3) trials are necessary (1 Pet. 5:10).

The New Testament ends drawing upon the clay-potter imagery. In John's letter to the Thyatira church in Revelation 2:27, he refers back to the Old Testament picture of chastening "as the vessels of a potter shall be broken to shivers." The clay-potter imagery is not an isolated metaphor. God uses it in both Testaments through multiple authors. In the New Testament, there are several aspects of the clay-potter world that are drawn upon to encourage and challenge believers.

CHAPTER 1

ASSESSMENT OF CLAY-POTTER KNOWLEDGE OF INDIVIDUALS IN CHURCHES

In Scripture, God frequently uses metaphors from everyday life to communicate divine truth. This usage necessitates a clear and accurate understanding of the selected metaphors in order to precisely communicate the spiritual truth illustrated. An important metaphor God uses in both the Old and New Testaments is the clay-potter imagery.

Two obstacles prevent an accurate understanding of the clay-potter imagery passages. First, for various reasons, commentators and other Bible resource volumes often ignore these metaphorical passages. As a result, for individuals in churches who hear preaching or do personal Bible study, the clay-potter imagery dimension of the text of Scripture is not addressed. Second, when dealt with, clay-potter passages are often treated either inaccurately or superficially. As a result, individuals in churches receive an inadequate or incorrect understanding of the spiritual truth God desires to communicate through this metaphor. Even though most people in our industrialized society lack a general awareness of the pottery craftsman, people in biblical times did not have this problem. Thompson states in reference to Jeremiah 18 that pottery making was a common activity in the Near East, and Jeremiah would have readily appreciated the lessons to be learned from the potter.¹

These obstacles to an accurate understanding of the clay-potter passages are perpetuated by two groups of individuals. First, some individuals have theological training but a limited understanding of the technical aspects of the pottery craft and its forming methods. They make explanations and applications that are foreign to the text of Scripture or contradictory to basic theological concepts. Secondly, well-meaning Christian potters treat these passages in a

¹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 432.

“popular” manner with little or no regard or awareness for biblical or theological accuracy. Such treatment results in explanations and applications based upon personal experience and opinion.

The result of the above stated treatments is the same, inaccuracy. Therefore, what churchgoers have been exposed to and the explanations of the clay-potter imagery they have received are incorrect. Divinely intended truth is obscured or misrepresented. Both the formal and popular literature review in the following two chapters documents and illustrates the source and scope for much of the misunderstanding of the clay-potter imagery by individuals in churches today.

The hypothesis of this researcher is that the clay-potter passages in the Bible have not had the divinely intended personal impact upon the people of the church. This important God-chosen metaphor has been slighted or misinterpreted and thus has not spiritually benefited the individuals of the American church.

There are three objectives for assessing what church individuals know of the clay-pottery imagery through analyzing and evaluating questionnaire answers from two distinct groups of church individuals. First, to demonstrate that there is a significant ignorance or unawareness of the frequency and importance of clay-potter imagery usage in the Bible. Second, to establish the fact that the Bible’s clay-potter imagery has been ignored, explained superficially, or misrepresented. Finally, to show that preaching and teaching of the clay-potter imagery passages in the church context accomplishes the following three things: it raises the awareness of the frequency and importance of the clay-potter passages in biblical material; it leads to the clay-potter imagery passages being clarified and expanded; and it verifies how these passages spiritually impact the lives of those who are exposed to their teaching.

Method

Respondents

In order to assess the exposure and knowledge of the people in churches of the clay-potter imagery, two groups of individuals in fundamental, Bible-believing churches were asked to complete a one-page questionnaire. The first group was individuals from churches in which this researcher held a clay-pottery conference. The second group was individuals from churches in which this researcher did not hold a clay-pottery conference. Questionnaire participants in both groups were adults (eighteen years or older) both male and female, from any ethnic or socio-economic background, and all participants remained anonymous.

The two groups were not equal, but there was a significant sampling from each group. The first group (Group A) consisted of 1,023 individuals from 18 churches. The second group (Group B) consisted of 1,008 individuals from 20 churches. A total of 2,031 individuals, from 38 churches from a total of 19 different states completed the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

The single-page questionnaire used in this research was developed by the researcher and focused on the key clay-potter imagery passage of Jeremiah 18 and 19. Multiple choice answers for Question One includes the various incorrect explanations found in both the formal and popular literature for the cause of the “clay being marred.” Questions Two and Three are designed to assess the individual’s awareness of the frequency and location of the clay-potter imagery in the Bible. Questions Four through Seven are designed to assess exposure to pottery demonstrations in both general (secular) and specific Christian contexts. The final question offers an opportunity to gain additional non-specified data. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

The Procedure

To assess the knowledge of individuals in churches, the researcher contacted pastors of numerous churches and asked to conduct clay-potter Bible conferences at each church. At each conference, this researcher demonstrated throwing various pottery vessels on his own portable potter's wheel and presented in-depth teaching from selected Old and New Testament clay-potter passages. At the conclusion of the conference, participants completed the questionnaire and returned it to the pastor. Participants kept the consent form for their records. Each pastor and church name remains anonymous, and individual questionnaires were not signed. After collection, the completed questionnaires were tabulated and evaluated.

This researcher also contacted other church pastors to see if they would be willing to have their congregations participate in the questionnaire research. Those pastors willing to participate were sent questionnaires with a cover letter of explanation. These participants also received a consent form and questionnaire from their pastor, and after reading the consent form, completed the questionnaire and returned it to the pastor. They also kept the consent form for their records. The pastor and church names remain anonymous, and individual questionnaires were not signed. After collection, the completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher.

After receiving the completed questionnaires, this researcher comparatively analyzed the two groups. Each question was restated, analyzed, and evaluated. Charts and tables were created along with a dialogue explanation of the findings. After tables of frequency were prepared, percentage calculations were done.² Comparison of distributions of answers was depicted in pie graphs and a polygon. A final report of the findings followed the guidelines of *Questionnaire Research* that includes 1) a formal introduction, 2) a description of the research method, 3) a

² Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 85. A major advantage of percentages over frequencies is that two or more groups of unequal size can be compared.

description of results, and 4) a summary and discussion of results.³ After the comparative analysis is completed, questionnaires will be secured and after three years will be shredded.

Results

A comparative analysis of the questionnaires demonstrates a significant difference in both awareness and actual content understanding of the clay-potter passages. There were two groups who filled out the same questionnaire. The first group was from churches where the researcher conducted a clay-potter conference, referred to hereafter as Group A. The second group was from churches where the researcher did not conduct a clay-potter conference, referred to hereafter as Group B. A composite summary of frequency with percentages of the questionnaire answers from both groups are tabulated in the following tables.

Table 1 Group A's answers to the questionnaire (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) with percentages (1,023 respondents from 18 churches)

Answer	A	B	C	D	E
<i>Question One</i>	10	14	969	6	33
Percentage	1%	1%	95%	1%	3%
<i>Question Two</i>	0	23	150	856	
Percentage	0%	2%	15%	84%	
<i>Question Three</i>	0	26	16	986	
Percentage	0%	3%	2%	96%	
<i>Question Four</i>	388	445	143	52	
Percentage	38%	43%	14%	5%	
<i>Question Six</i>	682	298	40	3	
Percentage	67%	29%	4%	0%	

³ Patten, *Questionnaire Research*, 123–26.

Table 2 Group B's answers to the questionnaire (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) with Percentages (1,008 respondents from 20 churches)

Answer	A	B	C	D	E
<i>Question One</i>	80	167	469	68	236
Percentage	8%	17%	47%	7%	23%
<i>Question Two</i>	1	433	474	110	
Percentage	0%	43%	47%	11%	
<i>Question Three</i>	8	362	72	558	
Percentage	1%	36%	7%	55%	
<i>Question Four</i>	339	471	173	52	
Percentage	34%	47%	17%	5%	
<i>Question Six</i>	891	98	13	0	
Percentage	88%	10%	1%	0%	

Question One: In Jeremiah 18, what was the probable cause for the “clay being marred”?

Question One assessed the individual's understanding of the meaning of the phrase “the clay being marred in the hand of the potter” (Jer. 18:4). As will be explained in detail in Chapter Five, Model Passage: Exposition of Jeremiah 18–19, only one answer is correct: C. Foreign material in clay, stone, chip of wood. The other four answers are incorrect, and impugn the character of God, the Master Potter. Group A results: 1 % A. Potter's wheel going too fast, centrifugal force; 1% B. Clay too wet, lost strength and sagged; 1% D.; and 3 % E. Potter's inability, lack of skill (see fig. 1). 95% of Group A selected C. Foreign material in clay, stone, chip of wood, which is the correct answer. Group B results: 8 % A; 17 % B; 47% C; 7 % D; 23% E (see fig. 2). Figure 1 (Group A) indicates the stark contrast in results to Figure 2 (Group B).

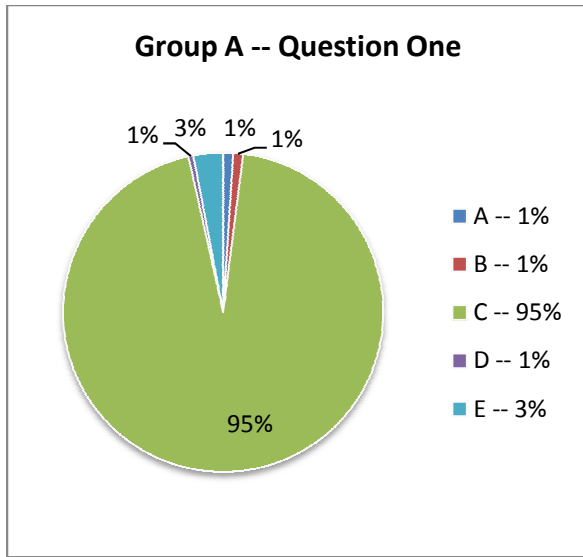


Figure 1. Question One: Group A answers

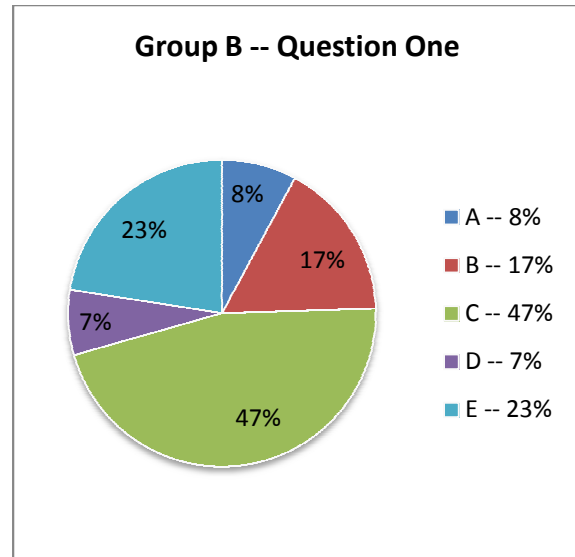


Figure 2. Question One: Group B answers

The comparison of these two groups on Question One indicates that 95% of Group A selected the correct answer compared to 47% of Group B. Collectively, 53% of Group B had the incorrect answer (see figs. 3 and 4). This indicates that more people chose incorrect answers than the correct answer.

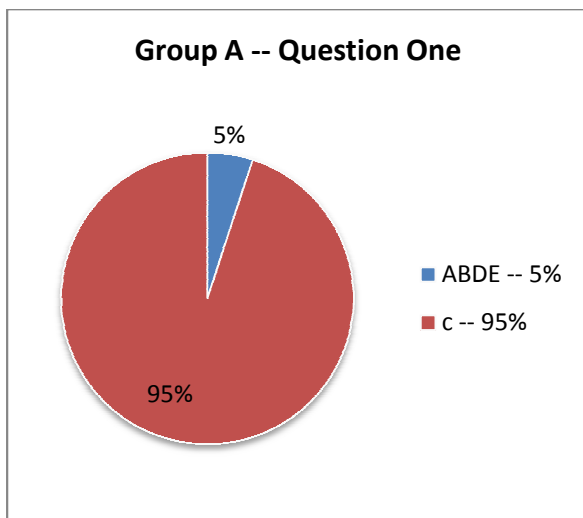


Figure 3. Group A: Correct answer compared to composite incorrect answers.

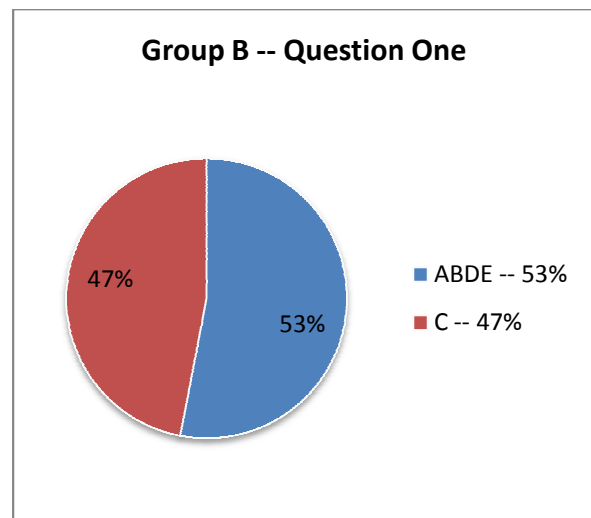


Figure 4. Group B: Composite incorrect answers compared to correct answer.

Question Two: How many clay-potter passages are there in the Bible (direct reference and/or allusions)? Question Two is intended to assess the awareness of the frequency of the clay-potter imagery in the Bible. The correct answer is D. 10 or more.⁴ Group A results: 0% A. 0; 2% B. 1 or 2; 15% C. 3 to 9; 84% D. 10 or more (see fig. 5). Group B: 0% A (only 1 of 1,008 questionnaires answered A); 43% B.; 47% C.; 11% D (see fig. 6).

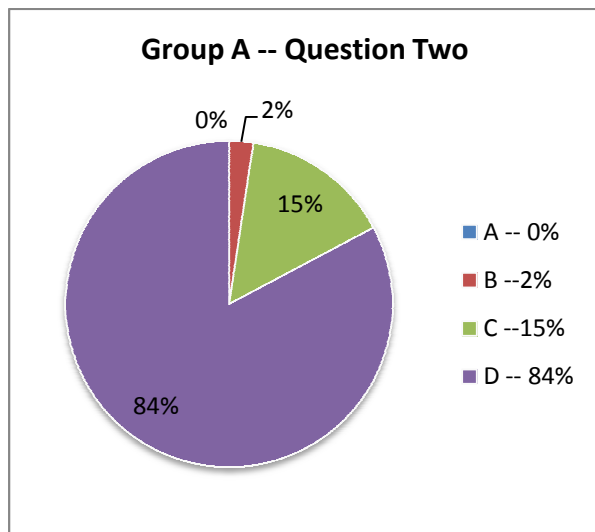


Figure 5. Question Two: Group A answers

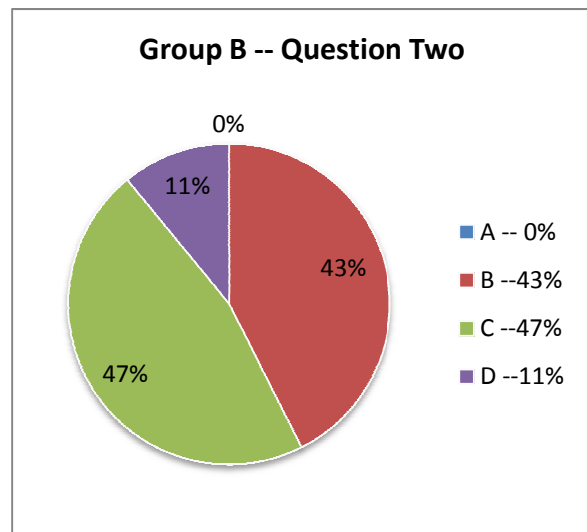


Figure 6. Question Two: Group B answers

The comparison of these two groups on Question Two indicates that Group A's awareness of the frequency of the clay-potter imagery is significantly higher than Group B. Very few answered A. 0% (1 of 1,008 questionnaires in Group B), a self-evident incorrect answer due to the very existence of the questionnaire and Question One. Another observation, even if answers C and D are combined and compared with answer B, the contrast between the answers of Group A and Group B is still quite significant. Answer B (1 or 2 references/allusions to the clay-potter imagery in the Bible) is an obvious incorrect answer to Question Two. However, it is

⁴ There are over thirty different references and/or allusions to the clay-potter imagery in the Bible: Gen. 2:7; Job 10:9; 13:12; 33:6; Ps. 2:9; 22:15; 40:1; 103:14; 119:73; 139:14–16; Eccles. 3:20; 12:7; Isa. 29:16; 30:14; 41:25; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18 and 19; Lam. 4:2; Hos. 8:8; Nah. 3:14; Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:20–21; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thess. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:20–21; 1 Pet. 1:7; 3:7; 4:12; 5:10; Rev. 2:27.

understandable that apart from a specific high number being given, or the obvious reoccurrence of a word or a phrase (such as *Jehovah* or *Thus saith the Lord*), 8 or 9 (upper range of answer C) could be selected in place of answer D (10 or more). When answers C and D are combined, Group A is 98% correct compared to Group B at 58% (see figs. 7 and 8).

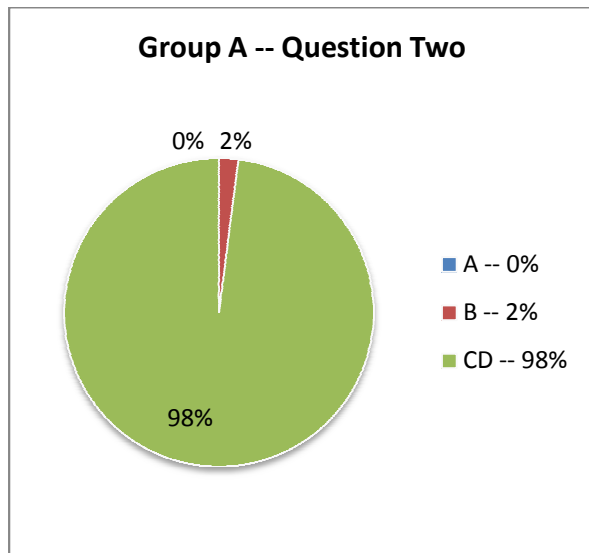


Figure 7. Group A: Correct answer compared to composite incorrect answers.

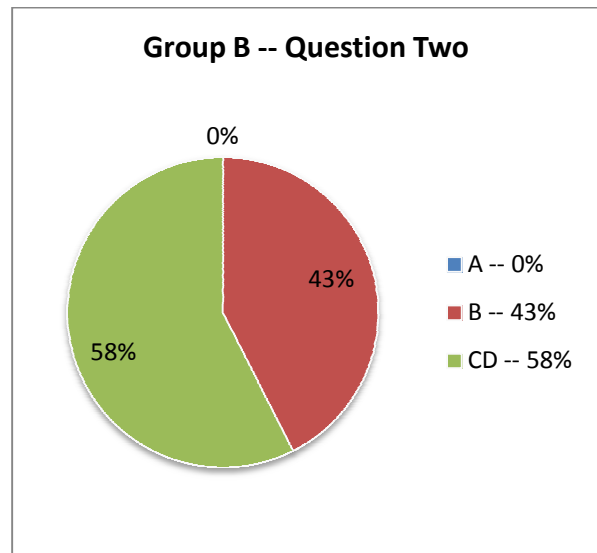


Figure 8. Group B: Composite incorrect answers compared to correct answer.

Question Three: Where are the clay-potter passages located in the Bible? Question Three is intended to assess the awareness of the location of the clay-potter imagery passages in the Bible. The correct answer is D. In both the Old and New Testament. Group A results: 0% A. Not aware of any; 3% B. In the Old Testament only; 2% C. In the New Testament only; 97% D. In both the Old and New Testaments (see fig. 9). Group B results: 0% A (only 8 of 1,008 questionnaires); 36% B.; 7% C.; 55% D (see fig. 10).

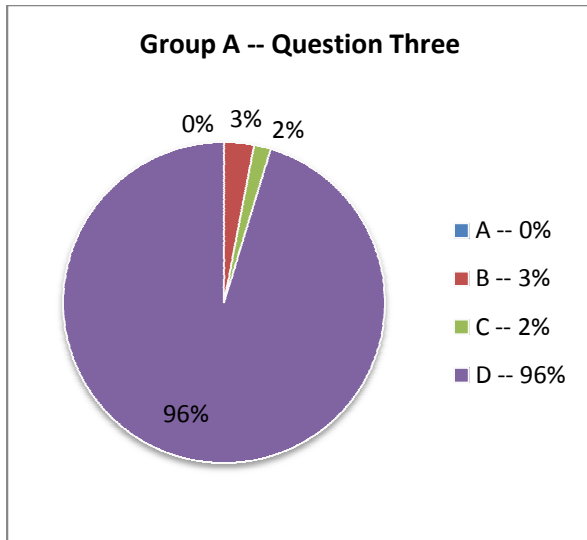


Figure 9. Question Three: Group A answers

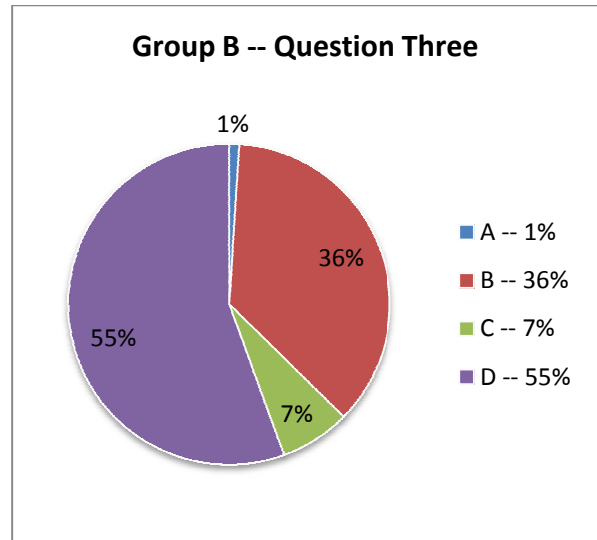


Figure 10. Question Three: Group B answers

The comparison of these two groups on Question Three indicates that 96% of Group A had the correct answer as compared to 55% of Group B (see figs. 11 and 12). Answer A of Question Three (as with Answer A of Question Two) was selected by very few (8 of 1,008 questionnaires in Group B) which is also a self-evident incorrect answer due to the existence of the questionnaire and Question One. Both of these (Answer A for Question Two and Question Three) indicate that overall those who completed the questionnaires read them carefully and took them seriously.

The comparison of these two groups on Question Three indicates Group A selected the correct answer 41% more than Group B. Collectively (adding Answers A, B, and C for Group B), 44% of Group B selected the incorrect answer on the questionnaire.

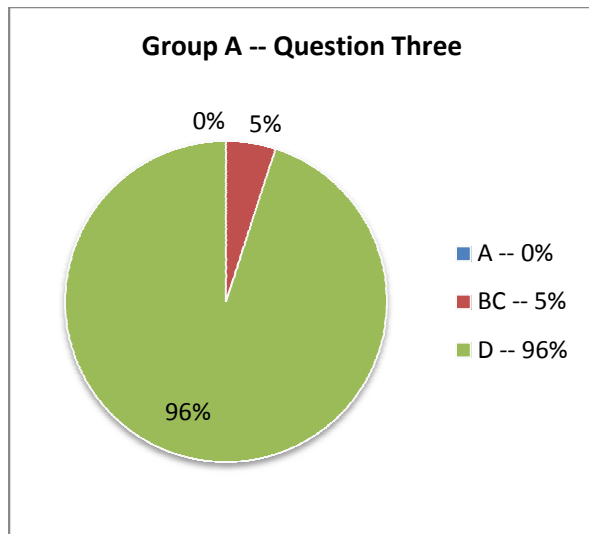


Figure 11. Group A: Correct answer compared to composite incorrect answers

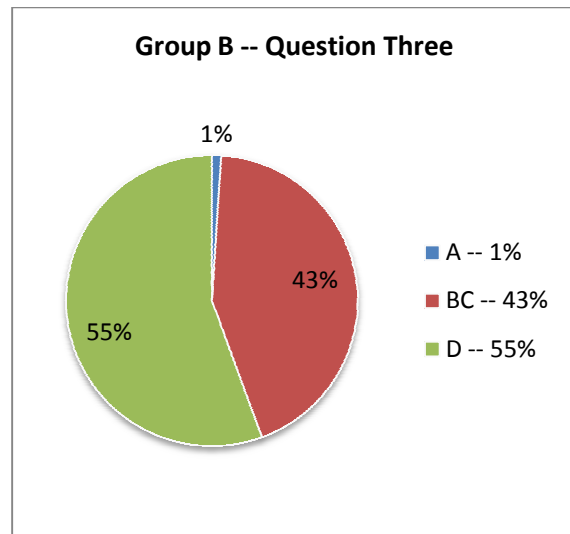


Figure 12. Group B: Composite incorrect answers compared to correct answer

Question Four: Have you ever seen a potter work on a potter's wheel? Question Six: Have you ever seen a Christian potter demonstration? (Questions Five and Seven ask for explanation of Answers B, C, and D of Questions Four and Six.) The results of Group A for Question Four: 38% A. Never; 43% B. Once or twice; 14% C. Several times; 5% D. I have myself (see fig. 13). The results for Group B: 34% A; 47% B; 17% C; 5% D (see fig. 14). The results of Group A for Question Six: 67% A. Never; 29% B. Once or twice; 4% C. Several times; 0% D. I have given one (see fig. 15). The results for Group B: 88% A; 10% B; 1% C; 0% D (see fig. 16). Observation of the answers to Questions Four and Six indicates the limited exposure to throwing demonstrations on the potter's wheel. Comparing Question Four with Question Six indicates it is quite evident that fewer participants have seen a Christian pottery demonstration as compared to having seen a secular potter throwing on a potter's wheel (see fig. 17).⁵

⁵ Many participants from Group A indicated answer B and added the comment that the present clay-potter conference just completed at their church was their first time.

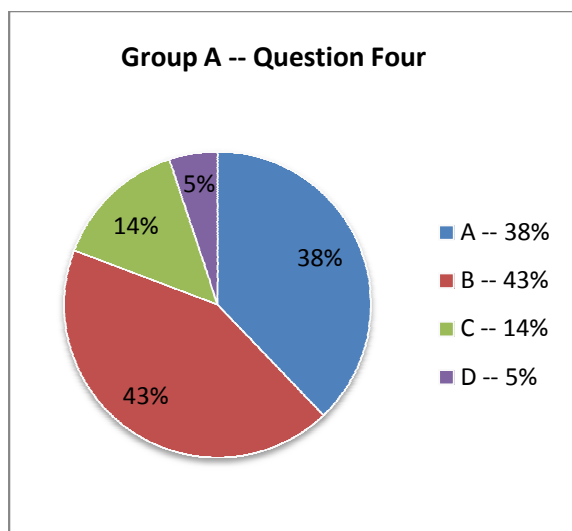


Figure 13. Question Four: Group A

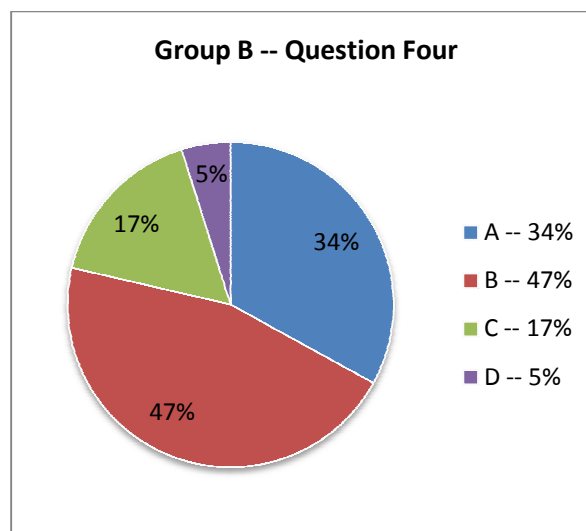


Figure 14. Question Four: Group B

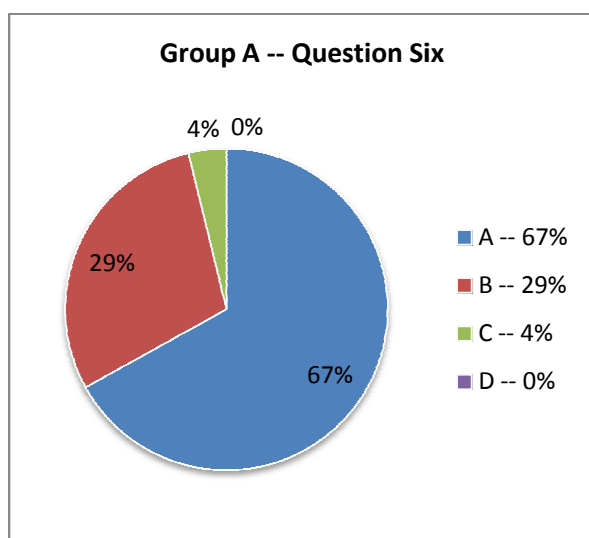


Figure 15. Question Six: Group A

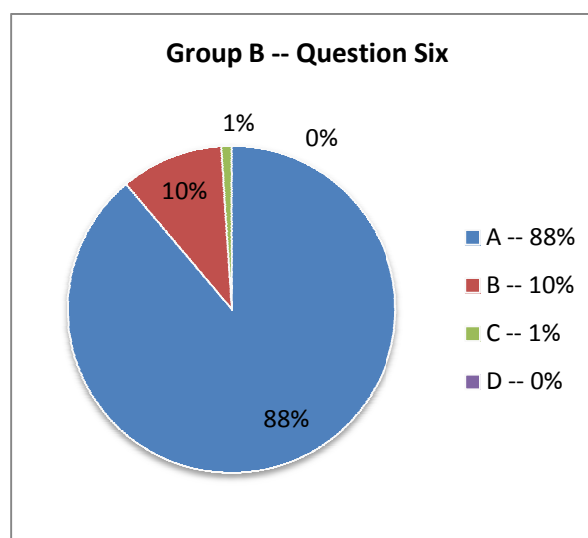


Figure 16. Question Six: Group B

Question Five: If B, C, or D answer for #4, explain circumstances (place and time)?

Question Seven: If B, C, or D answer for #6, explain circumstances (place and time)?

Questions Five and Seven were follow-up questions which produced some interesting details. An important observation reveals that a large number of Group A who answered B and C for Question Four and especially Question Six indicated that either at church (the present clay-potter conference) or

at Pensacola Christian College (while a student or a staff or faculty member) had seen the clay-potter demonstration and messages. In relationship to Question Six particularly, this fact taken into account, apart from this researcher's demonstration and teaching at PCC or clay-potter conferences, the percentage of Answer A (Never) would be significantly higher. From Group B five of twelve who answered B for Question Six indicated they saw a Christian clay-potter demonstration by this researcher either at a church, PCC, or on TV/DVD.

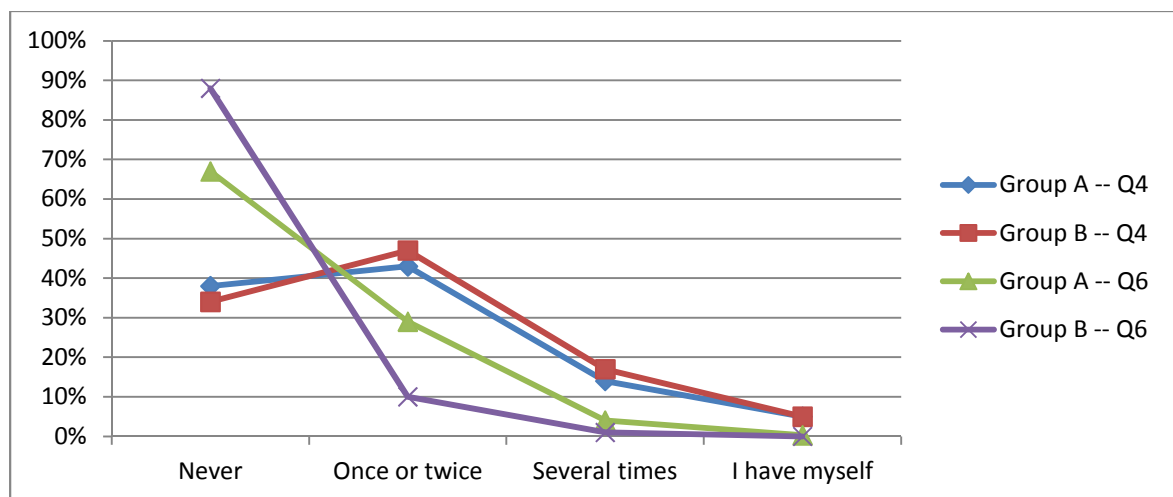


Figure 17. Comparison of Group A's and Group B's answers to Questions 4 and 6. This polygon depicts the exposure to a potter working on a potter's wheel. Question Four—General (secular or Christian setting); Question Six—Specific (Christian potter demonstration).

Comments from individuals who answered D on Questions Four and Six are also interesting. From Group A, 52 participants or 5% indicated they had thrown pottery on a potter's wheel, and three individuals had presented a pottery demonstration in a Christian context. Because the answers to the questionnaires were anonymous, there was no way to follow up on the details of where, how often, or what the content was. One individual from Nevada who answered D (I have myself) on Question Four said, "I have a studio – Fine Arts Major from UNLV." On Question Six that same individual answered A (Never). This individual is a

professional potter, has a studio, and yet never has seen nor given a Christian potter demonstration. Perhaps the clay-potter conference held in this individual's church planted the seed for possible future ministry.

Oddly enough 52 participants, or 5%, from Group B also indicated they had thrown on a potter's wheel, but none had given a demonstration in a Christian setting. One participant from a non-clay-potter conference church in Indiana answered D (I have myself) on Question Four. The explanation given on Question Five was, "I have taught art lessons." However, this individual answered A (Never) on Question Six. Possibly it had never occurred to him that he could use his skill for the Lord in ministry. Perhaps a clay-potter conference in his church could present the opportunity.

Question Eight: What question do you have related to clay-potter passage(s)? The summary of Question Eight is broken down into three areas: summary and comments from Group A, summary and comments from Group B, and comparison of Group A and Group B comments. Comments and questions from Group A illustrate and reinforce this researcher's observations and concerns.⁶ The need for the clay-pottery imagery passages to be clarified is seen in a comment from an Ohio questionnaire: "I always thought it was the potter's mistake if the pot was not right; never thought of a flaw in the clay!" A questionnaire from Florida had several questions that indicate the need for clarification of the clay-potter passages. Earlier in the questionnaire, this individual identified that she lived in Michigan and while at a ladies' meeting the speaker gave two or three pottery demonstrations/devotionals. Since I did not mention any explanation of the spiritual significance of water during the clay-potter conference, she asked, "What does water represent? I suspect it to be God's Word or the Holy Spirit. Or is it the grace

⁶ In addition to these written comments from the questionnaires that are summarized, after the final session of the conference, there was a question and answer time while the church was completing the questionnaires where many of the same comments and questions were expressed.

He gives us to yield and respond to Him?” Addressed and evaluated in Chapter 3: Assessment of Popular Literature is the common teaching by Christian potters who give demonstrations or write booklets that the use of water in the throwing process is a reference to the Holy Spirit. There is no biblical basis for such an explanation. The third question of this individual is insightful. This researcher at the clay-potter conference mentioned that water was only important to the potter for lubrication while forming the vessel. However, this comment was given in the context of the teaching on Jeremiah 18 that emphasizes the lesson of remaining pliable in the hand of the Master Potter, and no reference was made of the Holy Spirit.

Another suggested aspect of the problem with proper understanding of the clay-potter imagery is how frequently the metaphor is used in both the Old and New Testaments. The research statistics and charts establish the lack of proper understand of frequency of the clay-potter metaphor. A comment from a Kansas questionnaire indicates this as well, “I just did not realize how many.” Another questionnaire asked, “How many are there?” (Florida).

A proposed solution is to provide material that assists people to become aware of these passages and to properly study them. This proposed solution is definitely needed due to the lack or incorrect understanding of this important biblical metaphor. The desire by individuals in churches for more information on the clay-potter imagery was expressed in multiple ways. One questionnaire asked, “Is there a compiled list of these passages available?” Several questionnaires requested a study guide, pamphlet, or book to assist in further study of the clay-potter passages. Two different questionnaires from a Kentucky church indicate this desire. “Have you made a study guide for this clay-pottery study?” “Is there a written study available to use at

home?” The answer to this is yes, but resources are limited and contain multiple incorrect teachings.⁷

An Alabama questionnaire recommended “publishing a small pamphlet of Bible lessons on this topic.” Several indicated an interest in further study and thus needing additional material. A Florida questionnaire stated, “I plan on doing a study of this throughout the Bible.” A Nevada questionnaire adds, “Makes me very interested in studying this topic in the Bible.” A Michigan questionnaire makes a similar comment, “I will definitely do further study in God’s Word.”

Several questionnaires expressed thoughts related to the importance of the teaching of the clay-potter imagery passages. Two Florida churches expressed this in different ways. “Why are they [reference to clay-potter passages] not preached on more often?” and “These ought to be mandatory.” The concern for the next generation was stated by a Nevada and an Alabama questionnaire, “Are you teaching anyone this ministry?” and “Are you teaching this to others?”

That something needs to be done is evident. This thesis is the next step in the awareness and proper explanation and application of the multiple clay-potter imagery passages. Possible specific solutions will be proposed in Chapter 4: Summary of Problem and Proposed Solution.

Whenever God’s Word is preached or taught, there should be spiritual fruit. The clay-potter conferences did assist in the understanding of Scripture and individuals’ Christian life and walk with the Lord. The following is a sample of written evidence from various questionnaires:

I’ve learned much and much to work on. (Alabama)
I truly now understand the way God goes about shaping our life. (Florida)
It helped me understand the passages. (North Carolina)
This was a most helpful presentation at this time in my life. (Florida)
Gives us references to live by and grow in the Lord’s Word. (Nevada)
I pray it changes me, my irritations are many. (Florida)
I am so glad that God still can use a marred pot. (Michigan)
Sure helps me understand the need for impurities to be removed to make the vessel strong. (Florida)

⁷ This is identified, explained and evaluated in Chapter 3: Assessment of Popular Literature.

I thank God He uses the most common and ordinary. (Alabama)
It helps me to be a better Christian. (Florida)
It was very clear and challenging. (Ohio)
I pray it changes me, my irritations are many. (Florida)
Great illustrations to coordinate with Scripture. (Alabama)

Group B's interesting comments and questions also illustrated and reinforced this researcher's observations and concerns. The questionnaire completed by non-clay-potter conference churches sparked interest and at the same time indicated ignorance. "What is it? and what is the significance?" (Colorado). "Wondering what exactly is a Christian Potter demonstration?" (Indiana). "What is a Christian potter demonstration?" (Minnesota and Ohio). Another Indiana questionnaire: "What is the answer to #1?" (also two questionnaires from Colorado; and one from Pennsylvania). A questionnaire from a different church in Indiana asked, "What is it? What does it mean?" [referring to the clay-potter imagery in the Bible]. This same question appeared on a Georgia questionnaire, "What does it mean?" Another Indiana questionnaire stated, "No questions, but after guessing @ questions 1–3, I feel the need to do (or read) a detailed study on this subject." A questionnaire from a church in Kentucky wrote, "I am interested to learn more." Just the opposite response was written on a New York questionnaire, "Passages [referring to clay-potter imagery passages] seem to be self-explanatory." These passages are not "deep" or incomprehensible, but proper interpretation is not always self-evident as indicated in this thesis.

Comments on the questionnaires from Group B are filled with questions that are specifically addressed in the clay-potter conferences. Some questions deal with the clay-potter craft profession:

How do you keep the clay in place after the throw and turning of the wheel? (Indiana)
Can a potter make or repair a broken vessel, or is it better to just start over and mold a new one? (Washington, DC)
How long does it take to make clay useable? (Minnesota)

How does the potter select his clay? (Washington, DC)
 What are the most common contaminants or most common way clay is contaminated?
 (Georgia)
 How were they able to heat the clay hot enough in Bible time? What was used as a kiln?
 (Florida)
 How many times can the clay be reformed? (Georgia)
 How many times does a potter work on a piece of clay before throwing it away?
 (Washington, DC)
 Were shards of cast-off pieces used to draw away dross from gold being refined?
 (Georgia)

Many other questions deal with the spiritual teaching and application set forth in the clay-potter conferences:

Does the potter [in reference to God] when molding us, if we are marred, does he mold us to another vessel of use? What is the spiritual state of Israel when God sent Jeremiah the message of chapter 18 (clay-potter passage)? (New York)
 Is there a time that God gives up on us when we do not listen to him? (Indiana)
 How does it relate to my life? (Maryland)
 What is another interesting way to teach/preach this without the knowledge of the potter's wheel? (Indiana)
 How does this relate to a Christian's growth? (Colorado)
 How does this apply to me? (Connecticut)
 Can we be taught these Scriptures? (Florida)
 How many times will a loving God work with corrupt clay before He throws the clay away? Is there a point of cut off with God? (Georgia)
 How can this be applied to my life in a personal way? (Connecticut)
 How many times can we be reworked? (Ohio)

Comparison of the comments from Question Eight from Group A and Group B reveal interesting similarities and differences. Both Group A and Group B's comments on Question Eight demonstrate a need to clarify and to teach the clay-potter imagery passages. If all of God's Word is inspired and intended to be understood and applied to individual lives, this includes the multiple clay-potter imagery passages. The numerous written comments (and verbal comments from individuals where the researcher held a clay-potter) indicate the positive impact these passages could and should have on the believer's walk with the Lord.

Both Group A and Group B's comments demonstrate the desire for clear teaching and preaching on the clay-potter passages. The establishment of need, coupled with desire, cries out for a solution. This thesis, along with ongoing clay-potter conferences, is the beginning of a solution.

Group A's comments on Question Eight contrasted with Group B's indicate great difference how aware people are to the frequency and importance of the clay-potter passages. Individuals who have received the instruction of a clay-potter conference are more sensitive to this divinely chosen metaphor's significance. A second obvious difference is evidence of spiritual fruit from the clay-potter conferences of Group A. Group B, who did not receive the preaching and teaching of those Bible passages, evidenced no life-changing fruit but only an occasional indication of interest.

Summary and Discussion

All three objectives in assessing the clay-potter knowledge of individuals in churches were accomplished by the clay-potter imagery questionnaire and its analysis. Two groups of church individuals were asked to complete the same single-page questionnaire. One group was individuals from churches where the researcher conducted a clay-potter conference (Group A). The other group was individuals from churches where the researcher did not conduct a clay-potter conference (Group B). The questionnaire analysis demonstrated that Group A became aware of the frequency, location, and importance of the clay-potter imagery in the Bible. Group B's awareness of these was significantly lower due to not being exposed to specific preaching and teaching on this topic.

The correct understanding of the divinely intended biblical meaning illustrated by the clay-potter imagery was also established. The use of the phrase "the clay was marred in the hand

of the potter” in Jeremiah 18:4 demonstrated that Group A far exceeded Group B in the selection of the correct answer.

The final objective, clarification of truth and the resultant spiritual impact on individual lives, resulted from clear teaching of the clay-potter imagery. The questionnaires from Group B indicated some interest in this frequently used divine metaphor but little or no spiritual fruit.

As a result of this assessment, along with the assessment of the formal and popular literature in the following two chapters, this researcher will continue to present the Bible truth and its personal applications through clay-potter conferences in churches. However, additional needs surfaced through this assessment. This thesis will be the basis for providing additional material on the clay-potter imager for further study. The clay-potter conferences have two limitations. First, the conference is a one-time presentation that is limited to three to four hours of instruction. There are many more passages to be examined, explained and applied. Second, this researcher is limited in the number of churches in which he can present a clay-potter conference. Additional materials, either written or audio/visual media, can be a solution to these limitations.

CHAPTER 2

ASSESSMENT OF FORMAL LITERATURE

The literature review related to this thesis is divided into two areas, formal literature and popular literature. The brief literature review of the Introduction provided a general perspective for these two areas of assessment. The assessment of the formal literature in Chapter 2 and the popular literature in Chapter 3 provides more detailed evaluation and analysis. Thus the literature review is covered in two separate chapters. This chapter examines formal, or peer-reviewed, literature that could be referred to as academic sources related to the clay-potter imagery. The next chapter examines popular, or non-peer-reviewed, literature that could be referred to as non-academic sources related to the clay-potter imagery.

The formal literature review is divided into two assessments. The first assessment of the formal literature review focuses specifically on Jeremiah 18 and 19. The second aspect of this literature review focuses on general information related to the clay-potter imagery. The chapter concludes with a summary of the formal literature review.

Jeremiah 18 and 19

Review of the literature relating to the clay-potter passages of the Bible reveals three facts. First, both the formal literature and the popular literature that address the clay-potter imagery often misinterpret the Bible. Other literature ignores this prominent metaphor or provides a superficial explanation because those who have theological training lack technical pottery knowledge while some Christian potters have little or no formal Bible training.

Second, on the positive side, helpful information exists related to the clay-potter passages both theologically and technically which when synthesized and applied to the clay-potter passages assists in the correct and full understanding. This being true, often a commentator or an

article author identifies and explains an aspect of the clay-potter truth but does not pursue its meaning or broader significance possibly because he lacks confidence or understanding in the professional pottery field.

Thirdly, clay-potter imagery in Bible teaching has not been handled on the doctoral level. Searching the various electronic databases (Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses, Research in Ministry and the Theological Research Exchange Network [TREN]) establishes the fact that this thesis is not a duplication of recent research.

To demonstrate the above problems within the commentaries and journal literature, this writer uses Jeremiah 18 and 19 to establish the lack of or error in explanation, specifically in Jeremiah 18:4 that says, “Marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it,” and in Jeremiah’s specific vessel designation, “a potter’s earthen bottle” (*baqbuq*) in Jeremiah 19:1 and 19:10.

What is the specific cause of the vessel being marred in Jeremiah 18:4? There are five primary explanations that surface in review of the literature, only one of which fits both orthodox biblical doctrine and correct understanding of the Master Potter (which includes technical understanding of the craft of pottery making). Each of these five explanations is identified, examined, and evaluated.¹

The first explanation for the marring of the clay is that the potter’s wheel was going too fast; therefore, the centrifugal force destroyed the vessel. Even though Terence E. Fretheim states, “It can be assumed that God is not the reason for the inferior results; it is the clay/people

¹ As indicated previously, many commentators do not comment on the cause or nature of the marring of the vessel in Jer. 18:4. One example is W. Harvey Jellie, *Jeremiah*, vol. 17 of *Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 386-395.

that are corrupt,”² he later adds that the adverse effect depended “upon the quality of the clay and the centrifugal forces at work on the potter’s wheel.”³ William L. Holladay also suggests the cause of the marring is due to centrifugal force.⁴ Understanding the pottery craft makes it absolutely clear that the wheel’s speed producing the centrifugal forces is totally under the potter’s control. Every master potter is aware of the potential disaster in forming any vessel on a potter’s wheel rotating too fast. The rate of speed for initially centering of the clay on the wheel head is significantly faster than the speed used for the actual forming stages of the vessel. God the ultimate Master Potter cannot be identified with the potter of Jeremiah 18 if the explanation for the marring of the vessel is the potter’s wheel going too fast.

A second explanation for the marring of the clay in Jeremiah 18 is that the clay was too wet, therefore it lost strength and sagged. Among the multiple suggested causes of the vessel’s blemish in the vessel, Peter C. Craigie includes the clay “began to sag under the weight.”⁵ Sagging would only occur if the clay was too wet. Interestingly F. B. Huey, Jr., states just the opposite suggesting the inferior quality was not wet enough.⁶ Huey even implies that the potter is the problem by referring to the vessel becoming “misshapen as he worked.”⁷ Too wet or too dry is not the clay’s fault but the potter’s; he prepares and selects the clay to be used on the potter’s wheel. In addition to this, if the potter is unskilled and takes too long to fashion the vessel on the wheel and, thus, constantly adds water for a lubricant, the clay will become too wet and sag. A

² Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 269.

³ Ibid., 270.

⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 516.

⁵ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1* □ 25, 244.

⁶ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180.

⁷ Ibid.

master potter forms the vessel in a matter of minutes not hours. Even an hour is unnecessary to center, form, and refine a large or more complicated shape. Therefore the master potter does not begin with clay too wet to shape, nor does he take too long to finalize the vessel because either mistake would weaken the clay and cause sagging.

A third explanation for the problem of marring the vessel is that the potter did not have enough clay for the desired vessel and had to change his mind. H. Freedman correctly states the clay was marred “from some defect in the clay.” But then adds, “Or because he had taken too little, the potter suddenly changed his mind, crushed his growing jar instantly into a shapeless mass of mud, and beginning anew, fashioned it into a totally different vessel.”⁸ R. K. Harrison also states one of the possible causes is a defect in size.⁹ Every master potter has in mind exactly the size and form of the vessel he intends to make before he begins. He never takes “too little” clay and consequently has to “suddenly change his mind.” The Master Potter reflected in Jeremiah 18 is all-wise and all-knowing and does everything decently and in order. It is unthinkable to suggest the reason for the marring of the clay is due to the Potter’s lack of foresight or planning.

A fourth suggested cause for the marring of the clay is the potter’s inability. This suggestion is related to the previous but focuses on the potter’s lack of skill. This includes defect in design¹⁰ or a blemish in the design and shaping.¹¹ William L. Holladay, who labels the whole passage as “very childish,”¹² summarizes: “This is the lesson of the potter. Some pots turn out

⁸ Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 125.

⁹ Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 108.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah* 1□25, 244.

¹² Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 514.

fine the first time. Some do not, so the potter changes his tactics. It is a striking presentation of divine sovereignty and human freedom.”¹³ David M. Gosdeck questions this potter’s skill with his conclusion that “one pot did not take shape. So the potter shaped the clay into a different kind of pot.”¹⁴ As early as the 4th –5th centuries, Jerome in his *Six Books on Jeremiah* at least implies that the potter’s skill is lacking with the comment: “Then the potter who had destroyed his clay vessel on the turning wheel made of it something else.”¹⁵

Jack R. Lunbom summarizes the skill level of the potters of Jeremiah’s day well by stating, “Pottery in Jeremiah’s time was good quality.”¹⁶ G. Ernest Wright also validates the skill of ancient Israelite potters. “The craftsmanship is nowhere better seen than in the making of pottery. . . . Israelite pottery like that of ancient Egypt had a purely utilitarian purpose . . . it can be frankly stated that for commercial ware the craftsmanship and the forms are better than for similarly employed wares of today.”¹⁷ Wright adds, “Thus the old view that the Israelite had no artistic skill must certainly be revised in the field of ceramics.”¹⁸ No master potter uses trial and error or “I will make a simpler form” method of pottery making. The lesson of Jeremiah 18 as it reflects the Master Potter is not “some pots turn out . . . some do not.”

The fifth and final cause for the vessel’s marring is a defect in the clay, specifically foreign material such as a stone, chip of wood, or a piece of hard clay. This is an offered cause

¹³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 515.

¹⁴ Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 119.

¹⁵ Jerome, “The Parable of the Potter,” in *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 12 of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, ed. Dean O. Wenhe (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 145–146.

¹⁶ Jack R. Lunbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, vol. 21a of *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 813.

¹⁷ G. Ernest Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 18 (September 1955): 70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

by some commentators, but the problem is that they suggest this as one of many possible causes.¹⁹ Others, such as W. Harvey Jellie, give two helpful comments. “He [referring to God as the Potter as illustrated in the clay-pottery metaphor] has a design—to form a graceful vessel. He does not make marred things by design.”²⁰ With reference to the marred vessel, Jellie further explains, “This was not through imperfect skill in the potter, but through resistance or non-consistency in the clay.”²¹ Jellie is at least identifying that the problem is with the clay and not the Potter, specifically His lack of skill, but does not suggest the nature of the “marring” of the vessel.

Jellie’s second comment pertains to the remade vessel as “the perfect vessel.” “This perfect is the *result* which ‘seemed good’ to the Potter . . . He was thereby pleased and satisfied.”²² The only thing that pleases or satisfies a master potter is when the final form or shape is precisely as originally designed.²³ Jellie adds later, “The vessel must be made, not after some different type, but after the original.”²⁴

Jellie’s statement is different from many comments given by others who identify the remade vessel as a different vessel. This erroneous conclusion began even back with Jerome who

¹⁹ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah* 1□25, 244; Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 125; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 269; Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 108; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180.

²⁰ Jellie, *Jeremiah*, 390.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Though Jellie provides accurate comments on the marring of the vessel in his “Homilies and Comments” section as noted, in his comments under “Noticeable Topics” in Chapter 18 (pages 395–396), twice he incorrectly mentions that “one piece of clay after another is ‘marred in his hands.’” This undermines his positive comments on the potter’s skill. This conclusion (“one piece of clay after another”) is not warranted from the English text (“the vessel”) or a possibility from the original Hebrew text. This is unfortunate because if one vessel after another is marred, that may imply something negative regarding the potter’s skill.

²⁴ Jellie, *Jeremiah*, 396.

remarked that the potter, “made of it something else, as seemed to him the thing to do.”²⁵ Later in church history, Calvin also drew the wrong conclusion from Jeremiah 18:4. With reference to the marred vessel being remade, he commented, “He then made another vessel from the same clay, and, as it seems, one of a different form.”²⁶ A few centuries later, F. B. Meyer suggests an incorrect interpretation, “‘Made it again’ into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Perhaps this second vessel was not quite as fair as the first might have been; still it was beautiful and useful.”²⁷ This suggestion of the potter settling for second best is not the way any master potter operates. Another commentator from Meyer’s generation, John Gill concludes that the potter “put it into another form and shape it would better serve.”²⁸ A continuing array of modern commentators has misinterpreted the remaking of the vessel. David M. Gosdeck refers to the remaking of the vessel, meaning to shape “the clay into a different kind of pot.”²⁹ Philip G. Ryken says, “The potter skillfully forms it into a different vessel altogether. He turns a pitcher into a bowl or a lamp into a cup, whatever seems best to him.”³⁰ Neither the English translation nor the Hebrew original text allows for this interpretation and conclusion. “Another vessel” is explained by the following phrase “as seemed good to the potter to make it.”

²⁵ Jerome, “The Parable of the Potter,” 145–146.

²⁶ John Calvin, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 2 of *Geneva Series of Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 392.

²⁷ F. B. Meyer, *Jeremiah: Priest and Prophet* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1894), 81.

²⁸ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of the Prophets of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (1810; repr., Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979), 504.

²⁹ Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 119.

³⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *Courage to Stand: Jeremiah’s Battle Plan for Pagan Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 97–98.

J. A. Thompson is correct in stating: “The precise meaning of this verse [v. 4] is crucial to the interpretation.”³¹ The specific cause of the vessel being marred in Jeremiah 18 is indeed crucial to the specific lesson of Jeremiah’s day and to the basic theological understanding of who Jehovah of the Bible, the Master Potter, really is. Thompson identifies the problem as foreign material within the clay.³²

Admittedly Jeremiah 18:3□4 does not specify the cause for the clay’s being marred. Craigie’s comment is correct: “The reference to a blemish ‘in the clay at the hand of the potter’ is ambiguous.”³³ But any suggested cause must not contradict orthodox biblical doctrine or impugn the character of God, the Master Potter. Only the unskilled beginning potter would be guilty of the first four suggested causes.

Another area to discuss in peer-reviewed literature is their treatment of the vessel in Jeremiah 19, a potter’s earthen bottle. Word choice in Jeremiah 19 is another matter of identification, explanation, and evaluation. In contrast to Jeremiah 18:3□4 where a generic term is selected for the vessel (כלי), Jeremiah 19:1 and 10 indicates a very specific type of vessel (בקבוק). More is intended in the word choice than the simple fact that Jeremiah broke a vessel before the eyes of the secular and religious leadership of his day. The particular vessel Jeremiah was to purchase then break was a narrow necked bottle, flask or decanter (*baqbuq*). Keil assists in the significance of this term by giving the root derivation; he says that בקבוק is from בקק meaning “to pour out” and refers to a jar with a narrow neck and to the sound heard when liquid is poured out of it.³⁴ Gill explains, “In Hebrew *bakbuk*, from the gurgling of the liquor poured

³¹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433.

³² Ibid.

³³ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1□25*, 244.

³⁴ Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 306.

into it, or out of it, drank out of it, which makes a sound like the word.”³⁵ Examining how literature treats the specific details of the text demonstrates that this fact is ignored, superficially explained, or misinterpreted. Many identify the difference in word choice from chapter 18 and point out its onomatopoetic significance, but they do not explore the meaning or application of the onomatopoetic word (*baqbuq*).³⁶ Blackwood identifies the potter’s earthen bottle of Jeremiah 19:1, 10 as a “flask” (*baqbuq*) emphasizing the narrow neck. He adds the “name is onomatopoetic, from the gurgle of pouring liquid” and then cites Kelso’s classic two implications for the choice of this particular vessel.³⁷ Blackwood, Kelso, and most everyone else fail to mention the connection of the choice of the bottle or flask with God’s original design for Israel. God told Abraham that his seed (future Israel) would be the means that God would use to pour out His blessing upon the nations (Gen. 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8). This implies that the onomatopoetic name of the purchased vessel to be broken was an object lesson because Israel “hardened their necks” (Jer. 19:15).

Israel, as God’s chosen vessel, had become corrupt and contaminated by sin and the world and thus was unable to be used by God to pour out His blessing upon the nations (Gen. 12:1–2). Now God was going to chasten them severely, symbolized by the breaking of the bottle. The fact that Israel was God’s chosen vessel meant she was valuable. Israel’s value is also brought out by the specific word chosen that refers to “an expensive, ring-burnished decanter . . . this costly decanter typified Jerusalem.”³⁸ Wright concurs, “The most beautiful shape made by

³⁵ Gill, *Prophets of the Old Testament*, 508.

³⁶ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah* 1–25, 256; Dyer, “Jeremiah,” 1153; Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 495; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 271; King, *Jeremiah*, 171; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433. Others simply identify the vessel in Jeremiah 19 as “a clay jar”—Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 125, 127; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180.

³⁷ Andrew W. Blackwood, Jr., *Commentary on Jeremiah* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), 158.

the Israelite potter was the ring-burnished ‘water-decanter’, from the eighth and seventh centuries.”³⁹ Israel was not just any old, cheap vessel. Unfortunately one commentary detracts from the divinely intended significance of the clay-potter imagery in Jeremiah 19 by erroneously connecting Jeremiah’s action of breaking the bottle in the presence of the elders with a surrounding Ancient Near Eastern custom. “It is still the practice in the East to break a jar near a person and express the hope that he will be similarly broken.”⁴⁰ Breaking the vessel, a particular type of vessel, is not a vindictive act on Jeremiah’s part.

Pottery Equipment and Vocabulary

Review of the literature not only reveals that many do not understand clay-potter passages but also demonstrates that much positive has been written pertaining to the clay-potter imagery, both technically and theologically. Technically, clay-potter facts pertaining to equipment, methodology, and skill of the master potter can be ascertained from both Bible study and secular sources. James L. Kelso in *The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament* provides specific information on both pottery skill and equipment of the Old Testament period. Kelso also explains significant pottery vocabulary used in the Bible.⁴¹

Many of the commentaries and biblical culture resources provide a good understanding of the potter’s kick wheel. Magrill and Middleton answer the question in their article entitled, “Did the potter’s wheel go out of use in Late Bronze Age Palestine?” “Macroscopical observation, radiography and petrographic analysis of pottery from the Lachish workshop have yielded

³⁸ King, *Jeremiah*, 171.

³⁹ Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 72.

⁴⁰ Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 133.

⁴¹ James L. Kelso, *The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (New Haven, CT: American Society of Oriental Research, 1948).

evidence for contemporaneous production of wheel-made and hand-built/wheel-finished vessels.”⁴² The word “wheels” (אֲבָנִים) in Jeremiah 18 in its dual-plural form designates a two-stone wheel connected by a shaft (much like today’s modern kick wheel). The lower larger stone was kicked by the potter’s feet. The stone’s weight provided momentum in order to turn the upper smaller stone on which the clay vessel was formed.⁴³ At times this is referred to as a fast wheel in contrast to a slow wheel used for refining and decorating.⁴⁴ “The potter’s wheel had long been known, having been used throughout the Bronze Age with great skill. It was the two-wheeled variety, as we know from the dual form of the Hebrew name for it (’*obnaym*; Jer. 18:3).”⁴⁵ King gives a date of 1650–1550 BCE for when the fast wheel was used in Syria-Palestine.⁴⁶

Two comments that often occur in the formal literature demonstrate the widespread use of the Bible’s clay-potter imagery. First is the connection made between the verb and noun forms of the root word for potter (יָצַר). “The root is used extensively of Yahweh’s work.”⁴⁷ William McKane connects the word for potter with Genesis 2, “According to Gen. 2:7 Yahweh as creator shapes (יָצַר) man from the dust of the earth, and it is likely that Yahweh’s creative activity as described in that verse is envisaged on the model of a potter’s command over the clay with

⁴² Pamela Magrill and Andrew Middleton, “Did the Potter’s Wheel Go out of Use in Late Bronze Age Palestine?” *Antiquity* 75, no. 287 (March 2001): 142.

⁴³ Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 491; Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 125; Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 108; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 180; King, *Jeremiah*, 166–67; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433.

⁴⁴ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 244.

⁴⁵ Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 71.

⁴⁶ King, *Jeremiah*, 166.

⁴⁷ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 243–244.

which he works.”⁴⁸ “So the image of Yahweh as potter is a well-known metaphor for Jeremiah to use.”⁴⁹ Thomas E. McComiskey explains:

The basic meaning of the root is “to form,” “to fashion.” While the word occurs in synonymous parallelism with *bara* “create” and *‘asa* “make” in a number of passages, its primary emphasis is on the shaping or forming of the object involved.

As with many Hebrew words of theological significance, the root *yasar* may be used of human as well as divine agency. When used in its secular sense it occurs most frequently in the participial form meaning “potter,” i.e. one who fashions (clay). The word is used in this form frequently in the prophets where “the potter” provides an apt vehicle for the communication of the prophetic message (Isa 29:16; Jer 18:2, 4, 6; Zech 11:13). . . . When used of divine agency, the root refers most frequently to God’s creative activity. It describes the function of the divine Potter forming man and beast from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7-8, 19). . . . The participial form meaning “potter” is applied to God in Isa 64:7 where mankind is the work of his hand.⁵⁰

Thompson adds, “Pottery making was a common activity in the Near East.”⁵¹ It was a very familiar aspect of daily life in the biblical world and therefore an effective metaphor similar to sheep and shepherds.

Secular sources are of great assistance to verify the actual tools and skills necessary to make pottery in any culture regardless of geography and time. Articles from *Ceramics Monthly*, as well as pottery history and technical textbooks shed light on the clay-potter imagery the Bible uses.⁵² Glenn C. Nelson’s comprehensive treatment of all aspects of pottery making, includes a brief history which provides historical and technical expertise.⁵³ Ronsheim’s comparison of

⁴⁸ William McKane, *Jeremiah 1–25*, vol. 1 of *International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 421–422.

⁴⁹ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 244.

⁵⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, “יָצַר.”

⁵¹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 432.

⁵² Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*; Finkelstein and Na’aman, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*; Franken, “Analysis of Methods of Potmaking in Archaeology”; Gonen, *Pottery in Ancient Times*; Hodder, *Reading the Past*; Mandaville, “An Arabian Cave Potter”; Nelson, *Ceramics*; Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes*; Ronsheim, “Folk Pottery in Israel”; Troy, “Gleanings: A Potter in China”.

⁵³ Nelson, *Ceramics*, 1–31.

pottery methods in biblical times and at the present is summarized in her statement, “The potters [today in Israel] follow methods used thousands of years ago.”⁵⁴ Daniel Rhodes’ two classics, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter* and *Kilns*, are helpful relative to understanding clay and forming vessels, as well as the final stage of pottery making, which is firing the vessel in the kiln. Wright gives testimony of numerous kilns and potter’s workshops found in Palestinian cities. In one of the U-shaped furnaces (kiln) “the interior was full of pottery jar stands, partially fired. . . . The vases were stacked in the arms of the U and a fire built in the U’s bottom.”⁵⁵ These clear and well recognized authorities in the ceramic realm can guard against inaccurate or artificial interpretations and applications of the clay-potter imagery in the Bible.

Summary of Formal Literature Review

The formal literature review reveals three facts. First, many commentaries, Bible study resources, and journal literature do not comment on pertinent aspects of the text such as the cause or nature of the marring of the clay in the potter’s hand in Jeremiah 18 or the specific selection of a different word to identify the vessel purchased and broken by Jeremiah in chapter 19. J. A. Thompson provides the proper perspective on Jeremiah 18:4, “The precise meaning of this verse is crucial to the interpretation.”⁵⁶

Second, often when explanation is given related to the clay-potter imagery, it is superficial or erroneous. It either does not line up with technical aspects of pottery making or is theologically incompatible with clear theological teaching elsewhere in Scripture. The cause of the marring of the clay in the potter’s hand that Jeremiah observed was a direct reflection and

⁵⁴ Ronsheim, “Folk Pottery in Israel,” 31.

⁵⁵ Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 73–74.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433.

statement on the nature of the Master Potter. The connection of the two is obvious from the text in Jeremiah 18:6, “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.” (cf. Isa. 64:8).

Third, the formal literature contains much to be commended. Some commentaries, Bible study materials and journal literature do provide significant and accurate explanations of the texts’ key aspects concerning a particular detail, but they ignore or provide an incorrect interpretation or application of other specific details. Where does one look to find a full, accurate presentation of the text’s complete meaning and significance related to the clay-potter imagery? The answer is in many places, but it is necessary to exercise caution and discernment, which is difficult apart from having both Bible training and master potter knowledge and experience. Non-biblical sources, such as standard ceramic textbooks and secular articles pertaining to the clay-potter imagery facts that biblical authors have drawn upon, can serve as a hedge or reference point to validate the interpretations and applications of God’s use of the biblical metaphor. The main issue with the formal literature is its lack of or an erroneous understanding of facts related to clay or the master potter.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR LITERATURE

Now that the formal literature has been examined, the non-formal, or non-peer-reviewed, sources relative to the clay-potter imagery will be examined. The major headings for Chapter Three (non-formal literature) are devotional books, media material, Internet material, and a summary of the popular literature review.

This writer applauds the desire and effort of many who have provided devotional material from the clay-potter imagery. Some have been more successful than others. Some provide a more direct biblical connection than others. The literature review of the various popular materials available relative to the Bible's clay-potter imagery is intended to demonstrate weak areas not to discount totally the effort and product of well-meaning individuals. There is a place for this type of devotional literature (books, booklets, videotapes, DVDs, e-books), but this writer is advocating that another need must be met, namely accurate Bible exposition drawn directly from the text of Scripture and illustrated by the clay-potter metaphor.

Devotional Books

Three examples of popular literature on the clay-potter imagery are devotional books by Phillip Keller, Diana Pavlac Glyer, and B. J. Nicol.¹ Keller's booklet recounts his visit to a frontier potter in Afghanistan. He briefly references three passages that are true clay-potter imagery (Ps. 40:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:20 and Jer. 18). While gazing at an assortment of chinaware for sale on the potter's shelves, Keller makes an inaccurate connection to being "set on a shelf" in 1 Corinthians 9:27, not a true clay-potter metaphor. Paul is actually stressing his fear of being

¹ Phillip Keller, *In the Master's Hands* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1987); Diana Pavlac Glyer, *Clay in the Potter's Hands* (N.p.: Lindale & Associates, 2011); B. J. Nicol, *God's Pottery, Knowing the Potter and the Clay* (N.p. Xulon Press, 2006).

rejected or set aside.² The chinaware on the shelf is not placed there for disciplinary reasons but is displayed for sale. Later in the devotional booklet, Keller references “fierce fires” of the final glaze put on pottery, but glazing is totally foreign to biblical pottery because potters did not glaze the inside or outside surface of any vessels.³ King correctly explains that the vessels were embellished with decorative colored-clay (a liquid wash called slip) before firing and that “Israelite pottery, however, was not glazed.”⁴

Studio potter Diana Pavlac Glyer’s popular devotional book flows out of personal experience and not primarily Bible content. “In the Bible, it says that God is like a potter, and that we are like clay. This beautiful image has special meaning for me, and I marvel at it every time I go to the ceramics studio, sit at the wheel, and begin my work. It seems to me that the more we know about clay, kilns, wheels, grog, firing, glazing, wedging, and the life, the more this spiritual picture becomes vivid and useful in our daily lives.”⁵ This example shows the result of starting with personal experience and going to the Bible to explain the attributes of potters and clay. A few of these explanations are untrue of a master potter and certainly not true of God. For example Glyer says, “Clay gets all over the potter as the potter works with the clay,” and she uses Isaiah 49:15b–16 as an example.⁶ The master potter does get his hands muddy and often wears an apron, but this is far from getting clay all over the potter.

²Keller, *In the Master’s Hands*, 38.

³ Ibid., 41. Pastor Greene makes a similar error in his DVD, *Like Clay in the Potter’s Hand*.

⁴ King, *Jeremiah*, 168.

⁵ Glyer, *Clay in the Potter’s Hands*, xviii.

⁶ Ibid., 22–23.

In the chapter entitled “Restoring,” Glyer suggests several erroneous explanations for the vessel being marred in Jeremiah 18.⁷ The first suggestion is incorrect centering of the clay which causes the vessel to wobble until it leans and then topples right over. A second suggested cause, which she labels “one of the most common causes of damage,”⁸ is clay fatigue and consequent slumping. This clay fatigue is the result of “too many pulls, too much time, too much moisture, and the water will weaken the clay so much that the pot will simply flop over.”⁹ She also suggests the correct reason for the marring of the vessel as “one of those impurities.”¹⁰ These incorrect explanations place the problem squarely on the potter. This is an indictment against God’s skill and character as the Master Potter.

In a third devotional book, *God’s Pottery*, B. J. Nicol, who is not a potter, clearly states, “Everything you will discover in this book, I learned from research and observation.”¹¹ He visited a potter shop to photograph the pottery process and glean from the potter’s insights. The purpose of *God’s Pottery* is twofold. “The first is to teach you about pottery through learning the pottery making process. The second is, using pottery as a comparison, to help us see ourselves as God intended us to be when He created us, and to illustrate how we can assist Him in the developmental process.”¹²

After a short and very brief history of pottery, in chapter 2, “Its Intended Use,” Nicol begins to examine the clay-potter imagery in Genesis 2. In his discussion of God creating man in

⁷ Glyer, *Clay in the Potter’s Hands*, 63–65.

⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nicol, *God’s Pottery*, 5.

¹² Ibid., 14.

His image, Nicol emphasizes the “special dignity of being human” in order to “reflect and reproduce at our own creaturely level the holy ways of God, and thus act as His direct representatives on earth.”¹³ In discussing the fact that man was a created vessel “to be like Him,”¹⁴ he includes David’s words from Psalm 139:13–16 which stress God’s perfect and thorough planning even before a person is born. He concludes this chapter by quoting his pastor, “All God wants is yielded vessels willing to be filled with the Holy Spirit and used for marvelous works in these times.”¹⁵ Nicol accurately says, this “statement pretty much summarizes all of the following analogies in this book.”¹⁶

The rest of Nicol’s book focuses on the clay-potter process, even though a biblical connection is weak or even absent. Through the book, the author includes some of the clay-potter passages, but many passages, including 1 Corinthians 15:47–49 (not considered a clay-potter imagery passage) and Jeremiah 18:4–6 are written out only with the reference and are not explained or specifically applied.¹⁷ The author devotes one section to sanding. “After a piece of pottery is completely dry, it is sanded to perfect its shape and remove any evidence of its making, such as fingerprint, etc.”¹⁸ This is not a normal step in the process of forming pottery either in the biblical world or by master potters today. In fact, many potter purists forbid the use of sand paper with pottery; it is restricted to woodworking. In the chapter entitled, “The Pottery-Characteristics,” the author includes an extended parable or analogy, “The Master Potter and

¹³ Nicol, *God’s Pottery*, 22.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. 26.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29, 44.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

Jar.”¹⁹ This interesting eight-page parable does not refer or connect to any Old or New Testament clay-potter passage. This overall lack of connection to the divine intended meaning and application of the various clay-potter passages is a matter of concern as it is with other available popular literature.

Some devotional books on the surface appear to focus on the clay-potter imagery but have little or no direct teaching, explanation, or application of the metaphor. An example of this is Lyn Gitchel’s book, *Inside Clay Pots: In the Hands of the Master Potter*, one of the books in her series of Bible studies. The title raises the reader’s expectation; however, the sole treatment of the clay-potter imagery is in the Welcome and the Introduction. “God likens Himself to a potter shaping useful vessels. This is exactly what He is doing in our lives. Sometimes the molding process hurts a little, and sometimes it hurts a lot, but understanding how to yield to the touch of the Master’s hand and stay in contact with His goal for us is vital to our daily lives.”²⁰ In the next paragraph, the author adds, “This booklet contains studies that will help you understand the way God is working in you.”²¹ In the Introduction, she includes two vague allusions to clay-potter imagery, “He created Him in His own image” and “God molding you to His image.”²² Not one clay-potter imagery passage is listed, referenced, or explained in the fifty-plus-page booklet of twenty-eight Bible study lessons.

Another example of a devotional book with a clay-potter imagery title, but no connection to any clay-potter passage is poet–potter, Teresa Cartwright Baldwin’s *I Am Clay: A Personal Journey with God, the Potter*. Not one reference or quote to any clay-potter passage, not even

¹⁹ Nicol, *God’s Pottery*, 91ff.

²⁰ Lyn Gitchel, *Inside Clay Pots: In the Hands of the Master Potter* (n.p., 1995), 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 6.

Jeremiah 18, is included in the book. The only clay-potter material found is two poems, “God the Potter” and “The Potter’s Wheel.”²³ As Teresa Baldwin shares her journey of a personal relationship with the Lord as Savior, she occasionally mentions the hand of God on her life but does not mention any clay-potter passage or imagery at all. The only potter or clay connection is a picture on the front cover and the title of the book.

Media Material

Of the media material Lemme’s, *The Potter’s Talk*, is very free in its explanation and application of the clay-potter imagery. An example of inaccuracy in this studio potter’s explanation is that outside pressures on the clay represent the world’s pressure, and the pressure from the inside represents the hand of God.²⁴ The only pressure forming the vessel on the potter’s wheel comes from the master potter, both inside and outside, working together to shape the final form. She also makes a rash statement that any imperfection in the clay will eventually come up to the lip of the vessel; therefore the Bible cautions “watch your mouth.”²⁵ It is true the Bible warns the believer to watch his tongue/mouth, but imperfections in the clay do not eventually come to the lip of the vessel; therefore, the connection is unfounded.

This writer also evaluated two DVD presentations, *Like Clay in the Potter’s Hand* and *The Parables of the Potter*.²⁶ Both presentations were done by skilled potters who used their pottery experiences as the foundation for their explanation and application, and then they

²³ Baldwin, *I Am Clay*, 30–31, 52–53.

²⁴ Lemme, *The Potter’s Talk*, VHS (Denton, TX: 1994).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Greene, *Like Clay in the Potter’s Hand*, DVD.

connected various Bible verses to their pottery experience. The primary focus was on the demonstration with a Bible verse or principle tacked on.

In *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*, Pastor Greene makes a number of incorrect statements. First, he treats 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 as a clay-potter passage, yet this passage is clearly a metaphor of a master builder not a master potter.²⁷ Pastor Greene's explanation of the marred clay in Jeremiah 18:4 states: "Something happened, we don't know exactly what, but the pot was ruined in the hands of the potter."²⁸ At this point in the demonstration, he smashed the vessel, demonstrating that the marring of the clay was the potter's fault.²⁹ This is another example of demonstrating that the master potter is at fault for marring the clay.

In the DVD's final segment, "Finding Completion in the Kiln," Pastor Greene explained in the vessel's kiln firing, the clay changed from clay to stone, and he clearly identified this with the believer going to heaven.³⁰ The correct understanding of this biblical teaching is that life's fiery trials purify and strengthen the believer as God's molded vessel for service in this life, not going to heaven.

In the second DVD, *Parables of the Potter*, potter Joe Smith correctly explains fiery trials of the kiln as an illustration of this life's strengthening.³¹ Many of the applications given throughout the demonstration have a biblical basis, but few are pulled directly from specific clay-potter passages.

²⁷ Greene, *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*, DVD.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *The Parables of the Potter*, DVD.

In both presentations, a large percentage of biblical principles and truths are derived from personal observation and then identified with a particular Bible verse or passage. This is understandable for devotional applications, but true Bible study must begin with divine authorial intent. This includes the clay-potter imagery used as a metaphor to illustrate specific Bible truths and principles related to various aspects of the clay-potter world.

A third DVD, *In the Potter's Hands*, by pastor and accomplished potter, Pat Lazovich, has much to be commended.³² After he was saved, he received formal Bible training to prepare for full-time ministry. His video demonstration applies a significant number of lessons from pottery-making to life and includes various Bible principles. However, it fails to specifically explain truth from the clay-potter imagery as set forth specifically in the Bible. His presentation focuses on the pottery demonstration, which then leads to Bible truths and principles rather than focusing on the Bible's direct use of the clay-potter imagery then to explain spiritual truths.

Internet Material

The Internet sources of popular literature related to the clay-potter imagery must also be evaluated. Most Internet materials (with some exceptions) make the same errors in explaining the clay-potter imagery used in the Bible. Such errors include mixing metaphors, beginning with personal experience then adding the biblical explanation, and applications completely foreign to the text of scripture.

A common problem with this type of popular literature is that it mixes metaphors when explaining and applying Bible truths. The Internet article, "Potter and The Clay," mixes metaphors twice. The first time is when it discusses the use of Psalm 127:1 when it says that

³² Pat Lazovich, *In the Potter's Hands*, DVD (Costa Mesa, CA: Calvary Chapel, n.d.).

building a house apart from the Lord is vain labor.³³ The construction metaphor used in this passage is definitely distinct from the clay-potter metaphor used to fashion a vessel. Later in the same article, the second mixed metaphor concerns the topic of pruning (probably a reference to John 15). The article's author says, "Pruning out different things and different qualities . . . He [God] may also want to prune out some bad habits . . ." and "this cutting and pruning can be very painful at times" Later the article adds, "Resist God on this pruning and you may never reach to the heights"³⁴ The vocabulary of pruning belongs to the husbandman or vinedresser metaphor not to clay-potter imagery.

Another example of a mixed metaphor is found in the Internet article, "The Potter & the Clay."³⁵ This article correctly references the potter's wheel as the tool used for fashioning vessels. However, in the closing illustrative story, the potter is said to turn the clay on a lathe, a tool commonly used to shape wood.³⁶ A second concern is when the article states, "Sometimes the potter will completely change directions and make a different vessel than he started to make."³⁷ Before he begins, every master potter knows the exact form of the vessel and how much clay is necessary to make that vessel.

Studio potter Debbie Locklin compiled the Bible lessons she teaches in ladies' meetings, youth retreats, and "Clay Camps" for children in a copyrighted e-book titled *Trust the Process: He Is the Potter*. She presents these lessons about the potter and the clay as she demonstrates

³³ Michael Bradley, "Potter and The Clay—God Is the Potter, We Are the Clay," under "You Have to Be Properly 'Centered' in Jesus Christ," <http://www.bible-knowledge.com/potter-and-the-clay> (accessed November 3, 2012).

³⁴ Ibid., under "God Will Always Be Doing Major Pruning in Your Life."

³⁵ "The Potter & the Clay . . . Jeremiah 18:1–6," <http://www.chiptape.com/chiptape/Bible/Dad/Potter.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2012)

³⁶ Ibid., under "Ready for Using."

³⁷ Ibid., under "The third step is the Shaping on the wheel."

using the potter's wheel. The first lesson focuses on the process from centering the clay through the shaping of the vessel. The second lesson likens the firing stage to trials and tribulations in life. The final lesson uses the clay-potter metaphor to discuss God's plans and purpose for each of His children. These three lessons are divided into thirteen chapters in her e-book.

Locklin makes three good points. First, she states that "the potter and the process of his work was very familiar to most people . . . therefore they could easily understand the illustrations that God used."³⁸ This may seem obvious; however, it is a necessary reminder. Second, she goes back to Genesis 2:7 as when this metaphor was first used in the Bible.³⁹ Thirdly, Locklin correctly identifies the truth that both noble and common vessels are referenced in 2 Timothy 2:20–21. "People are all made of the same material, but our creative God makes each as a distinct individual with a unique purpose in life." She continues stating, "Once we are cleansed, we become a vessel of noble purposes and useful to God."⁴⁰

Yet with all the positives in this e-book, yet Locklin, like most Christian potters with little or no formal Bible training, reads too much into the clay-potter imagery from her personal experience. Rather than starting with the Bible passage and then drawing out the significance of the clay-potter metaphor to that passage, she reads into the metaphor from personal understanding through experience. An example is when she discusses salt water, which is used at times to cure clay, stating, "I found it interesting the salt water is preferred to cure clay, as God calls believers to be the salt of the earth."⁴¹

³⁸ Debbie Locklin, *Trust the Process: He Is the Potter* (Ragley, LA: Potter's House School, 2006) <http://www.thepottershouseschool.com/index.htm> (accessed November 3, 2012), 6.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 28–29.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

At times, Locklin is simply incorrect in her comments and application. In reference to the potter's wheel upon which vessels are centered and thrown (example, Jer. 18), she claims that "in ancient times, the potter's wheel was a round flat rock that the potter turned by hand as he formed the vessel."⁴² This statement contradicts archaeology and Jeremiah 18 since ample evidence points to the two-wheeled kick wheel being used in early biblical history. She then follows this explanation by connecting a "person's name" that is "placed in God's Book of Life" to the picture that as "the clay is stuck to the wheel, he is stuck to Jesus."⁴³ There is no ground to assert that one's name placed in the Book of Life is represented by the clay being stuck to the wheel head.

Also common to many Christian studio potters, Locklin stretches the concept of the "heart of the clay" to have spiritual biblical significance. These comparisons of the centering and initial forming of the vessel walls are far-fetched. She quotes another potter, "We must never be satisfied with small hearts and thick walls."⁴⁴ Later she adds, "God wants us to have big, loving hearts towards others and not to form walls around ourselves to keep others away."⁴⁵ Potters Smith and Lemme similarly and incorrectly connected the center opening of the clay vessel with a supposed Bible teaching of God reaching into the heart of man.⁴⁶

In chapter 6, "Shaping the Vessel," Locklin gives two options in forming a vessel. "You can shape the vessel quickly into a planned shape or play with the shape until you like it."⁴⁷ This

⁴² Locklin, *Trust the Process*, 9.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *The Parables of the Potter*, DVD; Lemme, *The Potter's Talk*, VHS.

⁴⁷ Locklin, *Trust the Process*, 17.

is not true of any master potter nor does it correctly portray the Master Potter's dealings with man. God's dealing with men and nations are planned, purposeful, and calculated (Eccl. 3:17; Isa. 23:9; 46:11; Jer. 4:28; 51:29; Acts 15:18; Rom. 9:11; Eph. 3:11; Heb. 6:18).

Locklin also falls prey to mixing metaphors, thus making an incorrect connection. In her chapter on "The Trimming Process," she uses John 15:1, which is the vine and the branch metaphor, and adds, "This trimming process is necessary for our lives as well as pottery, so that we might be more useful or fruitful for God."⁴⁸ Another example of a mixed metaphor is her use of Luke 10:38–41 when Jesus commends Mary for sitting at His feet and listening and likens it to the vessel going through a drying process awaiting placement in the kiln.⁴⁹ A final example of a misconnection from the clay-potter imagery to an unrelated Bible passage is Jesus' statement on the cross, "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28). Locklin references Psalm 22:15, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd," and concludes that "Jesus was in effect saying, 'I am a broken piece of pottery.'"⁵⁰ This connection, explanation, and application is completely foreign to the text of scripture.

Another internet article correctly suggests that the marring of the clay in Jeremiah 18 is the result of foreign material in the clay. "Jeremiah Learns Lessons from a Potter," identifies the foreign material as "a little twig in the clay, or a pebble, or a bit of clay that was dried and hard."⁵¹ The article adds, "The potter had to take out the lump or pebble or twig and start over again."⁵² Unfortunately, later in the article, an incorrect explanation is given for the last part of Jeremiah 18:4, "The potter finally gave up and decided to throw the clay away and start over

⁴⁸ Locklin, *Trust the Process*, 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵¹ Mission Bible Class, "Jeremiah Learns Lessons from a Potter," under "Background Study <http://missionbibleclass.org/old-testament-storeis/old-testmanet-part-2> (accessed December 1, 2012).

⁵² Ibid.

with more clay.”⁵³ This conclusion is contrary to the clear statement of Jeremiah 18:4, “so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.”

The article, “Pots, Potters, and Clay,”⁵⁴ is an example of an internet source that cites various works that address the meaning and application of the clay-potter imagery. The article suggests multiple causes of the marring of the clay in Jeremiah 18:4. “The clay may be the wrong kind. It may have too many impurities. The treading may not have been properly done, or the potter may have failed to place the ball of plastic clay in the exact center of the wheel.”⁵⁵ Even though one of the suggestions is correct (impurities in the clay), the other suggestions impugn the skill of the potter and thus are incorrect.

Summary of the Popular Literature Review

The popular literature review reveals three facts. First, quite often studio potters in their demonstration-explanation or devotional material mix the clay-potter metaphor with other unrelated metaphors, such as building a house/master builder or pruning done by a husbandman. Mixed metaphors confuse rather than clarify explanation and application.

Second, explanations and comments often flow out of the potter’s personal experience and not Bible content and context. As a result, many of their explanations and applications are free and quite subjective. The connection to the clay-potter imagery is the author’s experience and not the Bible.

⁵³ Mission Bible Class, “Jeremiah Learns Lessons from a Potter,” under “The Story.” A correct explanation of the vessel being remade. “When the vessel is marred, the Potter does not throw the clay away and start fresh with a new piece . . . never has the Heavenly Potter thrown His clay away.” “Lessons from the Potter’s House,” under “The Patience of the Potter,” The Sermon Notebook.
http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Jer%2018_1-6.htm (accessed December 1, 2012).

⁵⁴ Lambert Dolphin, “Pots, Potters, and Clay,” <http://www.ldolphin.org/clay.html> (accessed July 12, 2012).

⁵⁵ Ibid., under “The Work of a Potter.”

A third fact is that many of the explanations and comments are incorrect. These explanations, comments, and applications contradict either biblical content or archaeological facts. At times, some of the applications are contrary to the skill and thinking of a master potter. A couple of the devotional books are void of any contribution to the understanding of the Bible's clay-potter imagery outside of the title, cover, or introduction. This is not to say that the popular literature adds no positive information to the biblical understanding of the clay-potter imagery, but great caution needs to be exercised because most of these authors lack formal Bible training.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM AND PROPOSED SOLUTION

The assessments in the previous three chapters, 1) clay-potter knowledge of individuals in churches, 2) formal literature, and 3) popular literature, identify the problem with the treatment of the clay-potter imagery passages. The divinely chosen, frequently used clay-potter metaphor has been ignored, superficially treated or inaccurately presented. Therefore the impact of these passages upon the spiritual life of individuals in the church has been minimized.

The proposed solution establishes the true context of the clay-potter passages in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) world as a foundation and its close affinity to modern Western world pottery making. The connection between the world of the Bible and the world of the present-day church in America is established. Within this study, the difference in philosophy-purpose and methodology between Western and “oriental” culture relative to making pottery is identified and explained. Many common aspects in pottery skill and production exist regardless of time or geography that demonstrate significant similarities. Even today in Israel (Hebron), “the potters follow methods used thousands of years ago.”¹ F. B. Meyer concurs, “Amid the many improvements of the present day, the art of pottery remains almost as it was as many centuries before Christ as we live after.”² Possible clay-potter references in both the Old and New Testaments are listed, categorized, and briefly analyzed. This demonstrates the vast scope of the clay-potter passages in the Bible. Specific proposed solutions to the great need of detailed, accurate teaching and preaching of the clay-potter imagery passages conclude this chapter.

¹ Ronsheim, “Folk Pottery in Israel,” 31. This researcher visited Israel in 1997 and spent several hours with a potter in Jerusalem’s old city who explained his pottery production was the same as in Old and New Testament times, from digging his own clay to firing the finished vessels. His methods and techniques were very similar to those used by this researcher in the U.S.

² Meyer, *Jeremiah*, 80.

Is the clay-potter imagery inadequate or outdated and thus needs to be replaced in order to teach the related spiritual truth illustrated in this metaphor? This very question was raised in the research questionnaires. The answer is no. God in His wisdom has selected a variety of metaphors to illustrate specific spiritual truths throughout Scripture. It must be remembered that though the Bible flows out of a time, geography, and culture, its truths and teachings are timeless. An aspect of this important nature of God's Word is that the precise teaching relies upon precise wording including divinely selected metaphors. Each metaphor illumines specific nuances of truth relevant to that specific trade or profession.

Consider the sheep-shepherd metaphor that is also found in both the Old and New Testaments. Shepherding sheep is quite different from rustling or driving cattle. Who questions the adequacy and understanding of this metaphor? Experts in this field have aided the church's understanding. Phillip Keller, a trained agrologist at the University of Toronto and agricultural researcher, was for eight years "a sheep owner and sheep rancher. Consequently, I write as one who has had firsthand experience with every phase of sheep management."³ Keller sets forth his desire to further God's use of Psalm 23 in the lives of church individuals: "I make no apologies for presenting this collection of 'shepherd insights' into the well-known and loved—but often misunderstood—23rd Psalm."⁴ The reason for his volume echoes the concern of this researcher's thesis on the clay-potter imagery. Keller adds, "Like much spiritual teaching the 23rd Psalm has had a certain amount of sentimental imagery wrapped around it with no sound basis in actual life. Some ideas advanced about it have, in fact, been almost ludicrous."⁵ Keller provides

³ Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 10–11.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

additional “shepherd insights” for John 10, another key sheep-shepherd passage, in *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep*.

Another example of an expert aiding the church’s understanding of the sheep-shepherd metaphor is John J. Davis.⁶ Dr. Davis is a well-respected Old Testament theologian, Hebrew scholar, and author. As a seasoned archaeologist involved in many projects in Israel, he has observed, interviewed, and studied Bedouin shepherds. Dr. Davis, like Keller, brings an enriched and accurate explanation to the sheep-shepherd metaphor used to present encouraging divine instruction from Psalm 23. Seeking a new or different metaphor for the sheep-shepherd to illustrate specific nuances of spiritual truth and its application is unnecessary. So it is with the clay-potter imagery passages.⁷

The questionnaire answers in the assessment of clay-potter knowledge in churches contained several comments that either questioned the effectiveness of the clay-potter metaphor or asked for an up-to-date substitute. One individual commented on a questionnaire from a church in Indiana: “What is another interesting way to teach/preach this without the knowledge of the potter’s wheel?” “Why did God use the image of a potter-clay?” (Indiana questionnaire). The implication is that for today there might be a better metaphor. A questionnaire from Florida expresses the question: “Are there other trades of the Bible that are regularly used for illustration as pottery?” Several other questions or comments are even more direct: “Is there a more modern analogy that can be used?” (Indiana questionnaire), “Isn’t there a more modern illustration?” (Connecticut questionnaire), “I’m not sure how popular pottery is today (actual process). Is there

⁶ John J. Davis, *The Psalms: Studies in the Hebrew Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1975).

⁷ An interesting study would be to determine how many individuals in American churches have seen or been involved in shepherding sheep compared to those who have seen or themselves thrown pottery on a potter’s wheel. It is my suspicion from the data gathered by my questionnaire that it is probably a much lower percentage of the same individuals have seen a shepherd in action or actually herded sheep.

another modern day example that might appeal to a younger generation?” (Nevada questionnaire), “Is there a better illustration for today?” (Pennsylvania questionnaire). “Why did He choose clay—is there a better illustration?” (Florida questionnaire). There were questionnaires that suggested a better, more modern analogy: “Isn’t there a more modern analogy . . . a better illustration?” (Texas questionnaire) and “What’s today’s version of the clay analogy?” (Nevada questionnaire). There is no better way to communicate certain aspects of God’s relationship to His people than with a variety of metaphors: Heavenly Father, believers are His children and sons; the Good, Great, Chief Shepherd, believers are His flock, His sheep; the Master Potter, believers are the clay, His vessels.⁸

Do people misunderstand the clay-potter metaphor because pottery making in the Bible and its present-day philosophy-purpose and methodology are different? There are differences. One of the differences is the philosophy-purpose related to pottery making. H. J. Franken refers to the philosophy-purpose of pottery making as “the tradition [in the sense of inherited knowledge and routine] of the potters.”⁹ It is true that the oriental world often includes the ANE, namely the eastern Mediterranean world. But the artisan-craftsman philosophy-purpose of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and even the Tigris-Euphrates region was distinct from Far Eastern artisan-craftsman philosophy-purpose such as in China and Japan. War implements and trade-craftsman wares in the Far East, whether wood, clay, or metal, are often connected to the mystical, spiritual, and religious culture of the day. Both China and Japan had deep roots in ceremonial and religious ties to pottery making.¹⁰ This is not true of the Mediterranean and Western world.

⁸ Father and His children/sons—Luke 6; Gal. 3–4; Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 6; Heb. 12; 1 Pet. 1; Rev. 21; Good Shepherd, John 10; Great Shepherd, Heb. 13; Chief Shepherd, 1 Pet. 5.

⁹ Franken, “Analysis of Methods of Potmaking in Archaeology,” 231.

¹⁰ Darwin Luginbuhl (ceramics instructor) and Paul Soldner (guest potter lecturer) (lecture, Bluffton College, Bluffton, OH, 1970–71).

“Israelite pottery like that of ancient Egypt had a purely utilitarian purpose.”¹¹ This is especially true of the Hebrews whose aversion to mystical religion and idolatry was emphasized, thus the focus of pottery making was almost totally on utilitarian function.

Utilitarian function was not the primary focus of pottery making in China or Japan. “Decorative bronzes of a variety of shapes and with intricate low reliefs become an important part of religious ceremonies . . . The potter, influenced by the more highly regarded bronzes, made virtual replicas in clay.”¹² Nelson comments, “The reverence for the ancient bronzes, however, has been disadvantageous to the Chinese potter . . . [resulting in] unfortunate attempts to merge metal and clay concepts.”¹³ Another factor for decreased pottery production and development in China specifically during the Chou period (1122–249 BC) is that “China was plagued by numerous invasions by nomadic tribes of the north and west.”¹⁴ China’s greatest ceramic period is not until the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368–1644) and the Ch’ing Dynasty (AD 1662–1796).¹⁵

In relationship to the philosophy-purpose of pottery making in Japan, Nelson explains that the Japanese pottery craft had a highly religious connection. “Unique to Japan and perhaps fundamental to its present-day aesthetic is the Zen Buddhist philosophy and its development in the *tea ceremony*.”¹⁶ One example of Japanese religious connection to pottery making is raku tea

¹¹ Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 70.

¹² Nelson, *Ceramics*, 13–14. Page 14 has a photo of a wheel-thrown earthenware vase with a banded and incised surface suggestive of a metal form (a religious ceremonial vessel).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96. Nelson indicates this influence of Buddhist philosophy upon pottery making started with the aristocracy, then the war lords, and finally the general populous.

bowls which focus on the intellectual and philosophical with spiritual beginnings.¹⁷ Daniel Rhodes explains that the “Japanese raku bowls are in perfect accord with the spirit of the tea ceremony; in fact, they might be said to be its most perfect embodiment in pottery.”¹⁸ Steve Branfman assists in the understanding of the Japanese pottery connection to a religious philosophy. He asks, “Is raku also a philosophy, a religion, or a Buddhist ceremony?”¹⁹ His answer, “Any or all of the above is true, depending on the potter.”²⁰ Later Branfman adds that “the cultural and historical aura associated with raku . . . often seems inseparable to the potters who are involved with it.”²¹

Methodology differences in pottery making are also apparent between the Mediterranean and Far Eastern world. Although the “slow wheel” was first used in the Mediterranean world,²² the development and use of the kick wheel²³ (often referred to as a “fast wheel”) replaced the “slow wheel” quite early and allowed the vessel to be thrown or shaped rapidly (fig. 18 and 19).

¹⁷ Steve Branfman, *Raku, A Practical Approach* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Co., 1991), 12.

¹⁸ Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes*, 295.

¹⁹ Branfman, *Raku*, 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² A “slow wheel” was similar to a turn table. Two stones, the top turned slowly by hand to assist in the coil method of the formation of a vessel, a hand building method.

²³ A “fast wheel” or kick wheel is made up of two wheels (Jer. 18:3), a large stone flywheel to be turned by the feet connected by a vertical shaft to a small stone or wooden wheel upon which the plastic clay was formed into a vessel by what is called the throwing method.

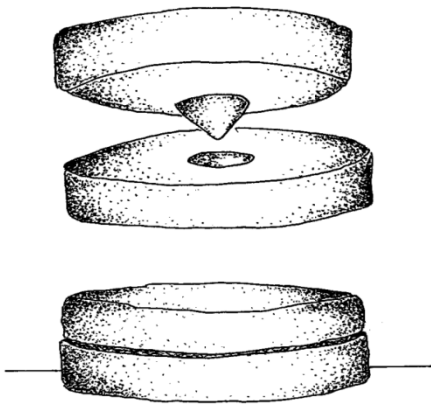


Figure 18: "Slow wheel"

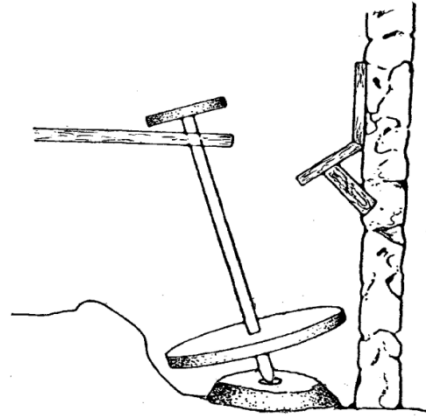


Figure 19: "Fast wheel"

"Most of the pottery used in Bible times was thrown on the wheel."²⁴ "The potter's wheel had long been known [in Israel], having been used throughout the Bronze Age with great skill. It was of the two-wheeled variety, as we know from the dual form of the Hebrew name for it (*'obnayin*; Jer. 18:3)."²⁵ James A. Patch provides an excellent description of the potter's wheel used in biblical times.

The wheels used in Israel and Syria today probably differ in no respect from those used in the potter's house visited by Jeremiah (Jer. 18:1–6). The wheel, or, to be more exact, wheels (compare Jer. 18:3) are fitted on a square wooden or iron shaft about 3 feet long. The lower disk is about 20 inches in diameter and the upper one 8 inches or 12 inches. The lower end of the shaft is pointed and fits into a stone socket or bearing in which it rotates. A second bearing just below the upper disk is so arranged that the shaft inclines slightly away from the potter. The potter leans against a slanting seat, bracing himself with one foot so that he will not slide off, and with the sole of his other foot, he kicks the upper face of the lower wheel, thus making the whole machine rotate. The lower wheel is often a stone to give greater momentum.²⁶

²⁴ H. Jamieson, "Potter," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 826.

²⁵ Wright, "Israelite Daily Life," 71.

²⁶ James A. Patch, "Potter, Pottery," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (1956. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1976), 4:2425.

In the Far East, preeminence of the kick wheel was much later. John R. McRay states that in Palestine and the Mediterranean world the “existence of foot wheels [were] . . . as early as the 4th millennium BC”²⁷ The earliest suggested date for the use of the foot wheel in China is about 1700s BC. “Pottery seems to have developed at a slightly later date than in the Nile-Euphrates regions . . . By the Shang period, 1766 to 1122 BC, the potter’s wheel had come into common use.”²⁸ This is a difference of more than a thousand years.

Prominent use of the potter’s wheel in Japan was even later. More advanced pottery techniques did not come to Japan until about AD 500 after Mongol invaders pressed northward overrunning the islands. “The Yayoi ware was wheel thrown, higher fired and had a burnished slip or shallow incised decoration.”²⁹ This is a difference of more than three thousand years.

Chinese and Japanese pottery production is quite distinct from that of the biblical world. Therefore, biblical world pottery making has a much closer affinity to twenty-first century American pottery production. Franken stresses the high skill level of the Palestinian potter during biblical times by saying “that potters of antiquity were aware of what they were doing.”³⁰ This is substantiated by another respected Old Testament scholar who said, “Craftsmanship is nowhere better seen than in the making of pottery.”³¹ Wright adds, “It can be frankly stated for commercial ware the craftsmanship and the forms are better than for similarly employed wares

²⁷ John R. McRay, “Pottery,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 4:1740.

²⁸ Nelson, *Ceramics*, 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

³⁰ Franken, “Analysis of Methods of Pottery Making in Archaeology,” 234.

³¹ Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 70.

of today.”³² With specific reference to the Late Iron Age (1000–586 BC) pottery, the time of Jeremiah’s visit to the potter’s house (Jer. 18), Markon and Gibson evaluate the level of craftsmanship by stating, “This pottery is characterized by a very high standard of workmanship.”³³

How pottery was made in biblical times is different modern twenty-first century American pottery making, but these differences do not change the basic truths of pottery making. One difference is what powers the potter’s wheel. All biblical potter’s wheels were kick wheels whose power was generated by the potter’s own feet. Although some potters in twenty-first century America have and use a kick wheel, electrically powered wheels are predominant. This does not affect the lessons and meaning of the clay-potter metaphor at all.

Another difference is the means of heating the kiln for firing the clay vessels to strengthen them for use. All biblical potters used animal waste or wood and were very skilled. “As much skill is required here [referring to firing pottery] as in throwing the best ware. Profit or loss depended upon the skill of the kilnman [individual in charge of firing the pottery] in controlling the varied temperatures of the kiln at all times.”³⁴ Biblical pottery wares were “fired in an open or closed kiln at a temperature of 450°–950° C.”³⁵ Folk potters in Israel today still use two-chambered bee-hive kilns.³⁶ Although some twenty-first century American potters use a wood fired kiln, most fuel fired kilns use oil, natural gas, or propane. Many potters of the last

³² Wright, “Israelite Daily Life,” 70. Jamieson, “Potter,” 824. Jamieson adds, “By the time of Joseph, Palestine was producing the finest pottery ever manufactured in that land.”

³³ Isaak Dov Ber Markon and Shimon Gibson, “Pottery,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), 16:425.

³⁴ Jamieson, “Potter,” 828.

³⁵ Markon, and Gibson, “Pottery,” 16:422. The Fahrenheit equivalent would be 850° F (lowest visible red) to 1750° (bright orange).

³⁶ Ronsheim, “Folk Pottery in Israel,” 33.

century fire their pottery in electric kilns. Heat in a kiln built up slowly over adequate time to purify and strengthen the vessel for use remains the same over the past several millennia.

Therefore the imagery of the metaphor is up-to-date and accurate.

Listing and categorizing possible clay-potter imagery references demonstrates the vast scope of the clay-potter passages.³⁷ Each passage will be categorized as a direct reference (direct usage of clay-potter vocabulary such as potter, clay, vessel, earthen vessels, potsherd, wheels), an indirect reference (usage of vocabulary that when taken in context of the entire Bible is often used in a clay-potter reference such as formed/fashioned, dust, dust of the ground, tried by fire, fiery trial), or allusion (general context could be a reference to the clay-potter metaphor, but lacks a clear, specific vocabulary or functional connection).

Possible clay-potter imagery passages will be listed in canonical order. The key words or phrases will be highlighted in bold-underline. Each passage will be briefly analyzed while identifying the context, the basic truth taught, and any complimentary supportive passages. Key clay-potter vocabulary is italicized in each Scripture citation.

Genesis 2:7, And the LORD God *formed* man of the *dust of the ground*, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Genesis 2:7 is an indirect reference. The context is the record of God's direct involvement in forming (sculpting) man out of particles of earth presumably clay. Man is an earthen vessel (body; cf. 1 Cor. 4:7) that was formed by God and was given life by the breath of God. This resulted in man, both male and female, having distinct personhood (image of God; Gen. 1:26). Genesis 2:21–22 indicates God's direct involvement in fashioning (sculpting)

³⁷ For additional study, several sources provide an explanation of the various vocabulary terms of pottery vessels in the Bible. Markon and Gibson, "Pottery," 16:421–426; Jamieson, "Potter," 828–829; Bryant G. Wood, "Before They Were Sherds: Pottery in the Bible," *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 1, no. 4 (Autumn 1988), 29–31.

woman as well. In Job 10:9 by way of Hebrew parallelism clay is equated with dust (also Job 33:6).

Job 10:9, Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast *made* me as the *clay*; and wilt thou bring me into *dust* again?

Job 10:9 is a direct reference. The context of this passage is Job's pleading his case before God as a man of integrity. Job draws upon his conviction that God must know, because He had made him from the beginning (vv. 10–11 poetic references to God's care of even the embryo/unborn child).

Job 13:12, Your remembrances are like unto ashes, your bodies to bodies of *clay*.

Job 13:12 is a direct reference. Job is questioning the counsel and motives of his friends. Job asserts that their remembrances and counsel is weak like clay (easily broken, as a clay vessel). Their counsel is void of truth and therefore was easily broken and consequently dismissed.

Job 33:6, Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am *formed out of the clay*.

Job 33:6 is a direct reference. At this point in Job's discussion with his friends, Elihu, the younger who has been silently and listening up to this point, gives his first counsel. Elihu expresses that he was upset with the other three friends. He declares he is different, not overbearing and blaming, but a man just like Job; and he said he was also just another clay pot.

Psalms 2:9, Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt *dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*.

Psalms 2:9 is a direct reference. Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm intended to provide hope for Israel because of the Lord's future righteous dealings with Israel's enemies, the wicked. The

psalm uses the frailty of pottery, easily broken, to illustrate the Lord's judgment upon the unbelieving nations. Jeremiah is instructed to use the same vivid illustration in Jeremiah 19 of God's serious chastening of Israel for her own wickedness.

Psalm 22:15, My strength is *dried up like a potsherd*; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

Psalm 22:15 is a direct reference. Psalm 22 is another Messianic psalm in which David uses the very familiar dry and dusty broken pieces of pottery found everywhere to describe his desperate state as being attacked by enemies. Much of this psalm is applied to Christ and His suffering and payment for man's sin on the cross.

Psalm 40:2, He *brought me up* also out of an horrible pit, out of the *miry clay*, and set my *feet upon a rock*, and established my goings.

Psalm 40:2 is a direct reference. Psalm 40 is a psalm of David intended to be used in temple worship. David, in remembering past blessings (vv. 1–5), makes a direct reference to the potter's selection and preparation of clay prior to being formed into a vessel. The clay was often selected and dug wet. The slimy, unusable clay had to be set out in the air and sun in order to dry out to the proper consistency before it could be thrown on a potter's wheel.

Psalm 103:14, For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are *dust*.

Psalm 103:14 is an indirect reference. The context of this Psalm is David praising God for His mercy and forgiving love. God knows we are but clay vessels (1 Cor. 4:7), frail and fragile (Eccl. 12:7 cf. Ps. 78:39 dust equated with flesh=our body), yet extends His care and grace to us.

Psalm 119:73, *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me*: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

Psalm 119:73 is an indirect reference. In this classic psalm focusing on the Word of God, the psalmist uses the clay-potter metaphor to begin the tenth stanza with the thought that the Lord fashioned and made him as a potter fashions a vessel. The psalmist's desire is to continue to be matured by the Word of God through spiritual understanding of His commandments.

Psalm 139:14–16, I will praise thee; for I am *fearfully and wonderfully made*: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was *made* in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth. Thine eyes did my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were *fashioned*, when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139:14–16 is an allusion. Psalm 139 is a psalm of praise to the Lord for who He is and what He has done. The focus of verses 13–18 is the Lord's omnipotent wisdom in fashioning man. Made and fashioned in the context of other Scripture remotely connects this passage to clay-potter imagery. Job 10:9–11 states God's knowledge, involvement and care for the unborn child, the poetic reference of Psalm 139:13–18.

Ecclesiastes 3:20, All go unto one place; all are of the *dust*, and all turn to *dust* again.

Ecclesiastes 3:20 is an indirect reference. The context of Ecclesiastes 3:20 is Solomon's reflection on life under the sun, the physical-temporal aspects of man's life. He concludes that both man and beast will die physically. The body of both man and beast is frail. But man's spirit has a distinct destination/end; man will face God in judgment (Eccl. 12:7, 14).

Ecclesiastes 12:7, Then shall the *dust return to the earth* as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 is an indirect reference. Solomon is about to present his conclusion of his under the sun investigations. Man's body (dust/clay) at the time of physical death will return to dust/decay (cf. Gen. 3:19). Physical life is fragile and not lasting.

Isaiah 29:16, Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the *potter's clay*: for shall the *work say of him that made it*, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Isaiah 29:16 is a direct reference. The context of the passage is God's warning to Judah for her hypocrisy. Judah incorrectly thought God was unaware of their political manipulation and alliances. They were wrong. Just as the potter knows everything about the clay and what he plans to make on the potter's wheel, so too God was aware of their seeking protection among men rather than trusting the Lord. It is also foolish to question God or to deny He is in control.

Isaiah 30:14, And he shall break it as the breaking of the *potter's vessel* that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a *sherd* to take fire from the hearth, or to take water without out of the pit.

Isaiah 30:14 is a direct reference. The Lord continues to warn Israel of coming divine judgment. God's judgment on Judah will be like one shattering a pottery vessel (cf. Jer. 19). Isaiah adds that even though broken into pieces, a sherd (pottery sherd—a broken fragment of a vessel, also referred to as potsherd, example, Isa. 45:9) still can be used, though not as originally intended.

Isaiah 41:25, I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the *potter treadeth clay*.

Isaiah 41:25 is a direct reference. This verse metaphorically is a direct reference to the potter's preparation of the clay. Often wet clay would be mixed in a pit trodden with bare feet, especially when other materials were added to enhance the natural clay's qualities (such as straw for brick, cf. Exod. 5). Even the princes, the rulers, will be trodden under foot in judgment as clay.

Isaiah 45:9, Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the *potsherd* strive with the *potsherds* of the earth. Shall the *clay* say to him that *fashioneth* it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

Isaiah 45:9 is a direct reference. The prophetic context is God's pronouncing future deliverance for Israel. God's identification of using Cyrus as Israel's deliverer (Isa. 44:28; 45:1) was not well received by Israel. This verse warns those who foolishly question God's ways and plans. The clay never questions the way the potter fashions it.

Isaiah 64:8, But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the *clay*, and thou our *potter*; and we all are the *work of thy hand*.

Isaiah 64:8 is a direct reference. As Isaiah closes his book of prophecy, he reminds Israel that the Lord, our Father, is also the Potter, the One who forms us. Israel was to acknowledge herself as clay admitting complete submission.

Jeremiah 18:2–6, Arise, and go down to the *potter's house*, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the *potter's house*, and behold, he wrought a *work on the wheels*. And the *vessel that he made of clay* was marred in the hand of the *potter*: so he made it again another *vessel*, as seemed good to the *potter* to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this *potter*? saith the LORD, Behold, as the *clay* is in the *potter's hand*, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

Jeremiah 18:2–6 contains multiple direct references. This is the model clay-potter passage (with Jeremiah 19) and will be explained in detail in Chapter Five.

Jeremiah 19:1, Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a *potter's earthen bottle*, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests;

Jeremiah 19:1 is a direct reference. This is the model clay-potter passage (with Jeremiah 18) and will be explained in detail in Chapter Five.

Jeremiah 19:10-11, Then shalt thou break the *bottle* in the sight of the men that go with thee,
And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people
and this city, as one breaketh a *potter's vessel*, that cannot be made whole again: and they
shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury.

Jeremiah 19:10–11 is a direct reference. This is the model clay-potter passage (with
Jeremiah 18) and will be explained in detail in Chapter Five.

Lamentations 4:2, The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed
as *earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!*

Lamentations 4:2 is a direct reference. As Jeremiah laments over the recent fall and
destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, he draws upon the clay-potter
metaphor that Judah, the precious sons of Zion, were not looked upon by Babylon as fine gold,
but mere common clay vessels. Israel was treated worse than the offspring of animals (vv. 3–4).

Hosea 8:8—Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a *vessel* wherein is
no pleasure.

Hosea 8:8 is a direct reference. This passage is a prophecy of judgment on Israel. Israel
sowed a wind of sin and reaped a whirlwind of judgment/destruction. As a result, they are
likened to an empty, forgotten vessel (one of no pleasure/desire) while scattered among the
nations (Gentiles).

Nahum 3:14—Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into *clay*, and *tread*
the mortar, make strong the brickkiln.

Nahum 3:14 is a direct reference. The Lord directs the prophet Nahum to announce to
Judah divine judgment that was soon to come upon Nineveh. Nineveh, converted nearly 100
years earlier through the preaching of Jonah, had reverted to their cruel and unbelieving
practices. Nahum 3:14 speaks of inevitable divine judgment that is likened to clay being trodden
under foot (cf. Isa. 41:25).

Acts 9:15—But the LORD said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a *chosen vessel* unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

Acts 9:15 is a direct reference. The context is the conversion of Saul (soon to be Paul).

Paul was now redirected in life as a selected vessel of service among the Gentiles, world leaders as well as Israel. As a vessel was used to pour out refreshment and blessing, so Paul was one of the Lord's chosen vessels.

Romans 9:20–21, Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing *formed* say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the *potter* power over the *clay*, of the same *lump* to make *one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour*?

Romans 9:20–21 is a direct reference. The context is God's reminder to Israel of her past, present, and future (ch. 9–11). It is foolish to question the ways of God. The vessel of honor is likened unto a *vāz* (special) (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–27); the vessel of dishonor is likened unto a *vās* (common) (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7). Out of the same lump of clay, the potter can make two types of vessels. This illustrates that God as the Master Potter does the same.

2 Corinthians 4:7, But we have this treasure in *earthen vessels*, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 is a direct reference. The context is Paul's explanation of the supernatural character of God's ministry through men. He chooses to work through our frail human bodies, sharing the treasure of the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:6) through ordinary men—earthen vessels.

1 Thessalonians 4:4, That every one of you should know how to possess his *vessel* in sanctification and honour;

1 Thessalonians is an indirect reference. Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to pursue a growing sanctified life. One specific admonition is to use his body properly, metaphorically referred to as his vessel.

2 Timothy 2:20–21, But in a great house there are not only *vessels* of gold and of silver, but also of wood and *of earth*; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a *vessel* unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

2 Timothy 2:20–21 is a direct reference. In this context, Paul paints seven portraits of the believer. One of these is a sanctified vessel, useable for the Lord's service. Not all vessels are special (honour—made of gold and silver); some are common (dishonour—made of wood or earth/clay). But any vessel, if purged of false teaching (2 Tim. 2:17) and iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19), will be sanctified and fit to be used for the Master's purposes.

1 Peter 1:7, That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be *tried with fire*, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:7 is an indirect reference. The context is the explanation of God's great grace, which includes times of trial (cf. James 1:2–5). Probable reference to a pottery kiln in which vessels are placed and exposed to heat in order to purify and strengthen them.

1 Peter 3:7, Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the *weaker vessel*, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

1 Peter 3:7 is a direct reference. The context is Peter's instruction to husbands of their requirement to submit (likewise refers back to 3:1 and then 2:18). Submission is God's desire for his relationship with his wife. The wife (woman) is the weaker vessel, 1) deceived by Satan

(1 Tim. 21:11–14), and 2) fragile and special, designed by God to submit/lean on her husband (Eph. 5).

1 Peter 4:12, Beloved, think it not strange concerning the *fiery trial* which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

1 Peter 4:12 is an indirect reference. Peter continues to give instruction related to suffering in life (continuation of the trial of your faith, tried with fire introduced in 1 Pet. 1:7). Probable reference to the pottery kiln fired by wood to produce sufficient heat to purify and strengthen each vessel.

1 Peter 5:10, But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have *suffered* a while, make you *perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle* you.

1 Peter 5:10 is an indirect reference or allusion. Peter concludes his epistle with the encouragement of the fourfold result of a vessel's kiln experience (fiery trials) in life. Peter concludes that we, having been purified and strengthened by trials, serve the Lord.

Revelation 2:27, And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the *vessels of a potter* shall they be *broken to shivers*: even as I received of my Father.

Revelation 2:27 is a direct reference. John concludes the fourth of the letters to the seven churches. The church at Thyatira was overcome with sin. Severe judgment from the Lord in the Millennium when Christ rules will be decisive (cf. Psalms 2:9; Isaiah 30:14). This judgment is metaphorically stated by the vessels of a potter broken into pieces.

Jeremiah 18–19, the key clay-potter imagery passage in the Bible, is treated in detail in Chapter Five, which provides an example of proper interpretation and application of this selected

metaphor. Other selected clay-potter passages are exegeted, explained, and applied in the Appendix.

The above listing, categorization, and brief analysis of the clay-potter imagery passages in both the Old and New Testaments establishes the vast scope. The clay-potter imagery metaphor is often used by God to illustrate a variety of spiritual truths. It has also been demonstrated that the divinely selected clay-potter metaphor is not outdated. The pottery philosophy-purpose and methodology of biblical potters can be clearly and precisely applied today with the aid of proper knowledge and understanding of clay-potter skill and vocabulary.

The proposed solution has three elements. The first element is this thesis, which thoroughly explains and applies the key clay-potter imagery passage, Jeremiah 18–19. This exposition and application is provided in Chapter Five, Model Passage: Exposition of Jeremiah 18–19. In addition to the detailed exposition of Jeremiah 18–19, the Appendix will include brief expositions and applications of selected other clay-potter passages.

A second element in the proposed solution is this researcher will continue presenting these clay-potter Bible truths in additional conferences in local churches. What began back in the mid-1980s will continue, and church by church, individual by individual will be instructed, challenged, and encouraged through future preaching and teaching of the Bible's clay-potter passages. Several churches are already scheduled for the coming year.

A third element of the solution to overcome the lack of understanding of the Bible's clay-potter imagery passages is to provide detailed study material in printed and/or media format. Much of the Bible study material in this thesis will be the foundation for that material. This will provide additional study material for individuals in churches following a clay-potter conference as well as initial study material on the clay-potter passages for individuals and churches where

this researcher is not able to present a conference of the clay-potter metaphor. These materials will also provide guidelines and content for future Christian potters to incorporate into presentations using their pottery skill within a biblically correct perspective and context.

CHAPTER 5

MODEL PASSAGE: EXPOSITION OF JEREMIAH 18–19

Jeremiah 18 and 19, the model clay-potter imagery passage, is probably the most familiar of all such passages in the Bible. Compared to any other passage in the Old or New Testament, Jeremiah 18 and 19 is the most direct and also has the most clay-potter vocabulary references (clay, potter, vessel, potter's house, work on the wheels, potter's hand, potter's earth bottle, bottle, and potter's vessel).

This chapter provides the reader with an example of a correct treatment of a clay-potter passage. The reader can grasp the depth and vividness of the metaphor's teaching as well as ascertain specific personal and practical implications for daily Christian life. Selected additional passages in the Appendix provide the reader with more examples of correct interpretation and personal applications on a less in-depth level. These studies supply the foundation for a Bible study tool focusing on the clay-potter imagery in the Bible.

Jeremiah and his contemporaries, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk, were God's spokesmen in Judah's final days before and during the Babylonian captivity. These prophets' message of warning and pleading with Israel and Judah to forsake their wickedness and idolatry and return to Jehovah their God was not new but an extension of their forerunners, Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea. Israel refused to heed the divine warning and call to repentance and was chastened by Assyria in 722 BC and ceased to exist as a nation. Through a parable of two sisters, Ezekiel, Jeremiah's contemporary already in captivity in Babylon, warned the remaining nation, Judah (Aholibah, the younger sister) that she ought to learn the lesson from Israel (Aholah, the older sister) (Ezek. 23). God had been patient and was serious about His warning of future chastening if there was no repentance.

Jeremiah's life and ministry can be divided into three stages. The first stage is when Assyria and Egypt threatened Judah (625–605 BC). The reign of Josiah, Judah's godly king, experienced little suffering and opposition, and righteousness prevailed in the land. The Book of the Law was found in Josiah's eighteenth year, five years after Jeremiah's call. Jeremiah experienced some opposition from his home town, Anathoth (Jer. 11:18–23), but that was the usual reception of a prophet in his home town (Matt. 13:54–57; Mark 6:3–4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44). During this time Nineveh fell (612 BC) causing a shift of power in the Mediterranean world.

The second stage of Jeremiah's life and ministry is from 605–586 BC. During this time of Babylon's threat and siege, three wicked kings, Jehoikim, Jehoichin, and Zedekiah (Jehoahaz only ruled three months between Josiah and Jehoikim), ruled Judah. Judah experienced three Babylonian attacks and deportations during this period. The first was in 605 BC when Daniel, Hanniah, Azariah, and Mishael with other young potential leaders were taken to Babylon to be trained as subservient Babylonian government officials. The second attack and deportation in 598 BC was much more severe. Ezekiel was taken captive and lived out his entire life and ministry in a refugee camp outside Babylon at a place referred to as Tel Abib along the abandoned canal called the River Chebar. The third and final attack and deportation came at the end of this time, 586 BC, when Babylon totally destroyed Jerusalem, killing many and taking others captive. The events of Jeremiah 18–19 are placed before the destruction of Jerusalem.

The third stage of Jeremiah's life and ministry is from 586–580 BC. This period of Jeremiah's life was bittersweet. He was among those who survived and remained in Jerusalem after the fall of the city and the destruction of the Temple. His prophetic warnings and predictions had been proven true. His message and ministry were vindicated. But God's beloved

city and land lay wasted, broken as the potter's vessel in Jeremiah 19 because Judah had not placed herself back on the potter's wheel to be reshaped by the Lord (Jeremiah 18).

Jeremiah 18 and 19 are part of the eighth of a series of sermons recorded in Jeremiah 2:1–25:38. Chapters 18–20 are best understood as a unit, dating from the early years of Jehoiakim's reign (609–598 BC). Plumptre suggests the time is “probably before the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim. It has the character of a last warning to king and people, and its rejection is followed in its turn by the more decisive use of the same symbol in chap. xix.”¹ This places these chapters in the middle of the second stage of Jeremiah's life and ministry characterized by opposition and suffering. His message of warning and repentance often fell on deaf ears.

Jeremiah 18 can be divided into five parts: 1) what Jeremiah was told to do (vv. 1–2); 2) what Jeremiah saw (vv. 3–9); 3) what Jeremiah heard (vv. 5–11); 4) what Jeremiah preached (vv. 13–17); and 5) how Jeremiah's message was received (vv. 18–23). This chapter presents a biblical balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. “Far too many have misunderstood this parable because they have seen God in light of an arbitrary sovereign, whereas the deeper level of meaning speaks of God's grace that underlay the coming disaster on Judah.”² The Lord is the Master Potter; we are the clay, and therefore must be pliable in His hands to mold and shape us into vessels of honor to be used for His glory.

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to arise and go down to the potter's house. Every city or town of any size had its local potter, who skillfully formed a variety of vessels with his own hands. Because of its size, Jerusalem had many potters. 1 Chronicles 4:23 indicates, “The potters

¹ E. H. Plumptre, *Jeremiah*, in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Charles John Ellicott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 5:65. Freedman, *Jeremiah*, 125. Freedman concurs that chapters 18–20 “dates from the early years of the reign of Jehoiakim.”

² Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 490.

of Judah formed a guild and probably occupied a quarter of their own, perhaps on the lower slopes of Hinnom.”³ Going down to the “potter’s house” is not a reference to where the potter lived but the location of his shop or studio, though many potters lived near their shops. This was not an unusual request. Jeremiah, like everyone, knew precisely where pottery was manufactured in his town.

Verse two adds that “there I will cause thee to hear my words.” The specific selection of words is important. The Lord said, “I will cause thee to hear my words.” The word for to hear (שמע) is the Hebrew word that means more than to simply hear or listen but includes the idea of understanding in order for the message (words) to be heeded and impact the hearer. Herman J. Austel explains, “The basic idea is that of perceiving a message . . . Effective hearing involves also the idea of ‘understanding.’”⁴ Jeremiah was going to observe an object lesson (a vessel made, marred, and remade, v. 4), but then the Lord was going to cause (*hiphil* imperfect or causative stem of the *qal* in the Hebrew) Jeremiah to grasp the spiritual lesson behind the physical illustration. Jeremiah was to transfer what he saw (the physical) to the unseen (the spiritual) in order to share the divine warning with Judah (v. 11).

Verses three and four explain what Jeremiah saw. Immediately Jeremiah went down to the potter’s house and observed a vessel in the process of being formed on the potter’s wheel. The *qal* participle (יצר, wrought, form, or create) indicated the vessel was being shaped when Jeremiah arrived. The fact that the potter was working on a two wheeled potter’s wheel (previously identified in this thesis as a fast wheel) is indicated by the dual plural form of wheels (אבנים). The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) provides a good description of what

³ Elliott L. Binns, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Methuen, 1919), 146.

⁴ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, S.v. “יצר,” by Herman J. Austel, 938–939.

Jeremiah witnessed: “So it is with the potter, sitting at his work, turning the wheel with his feet, always engrossed in the task of making up his tally; he moulds the clay with his arm, crouching forward to apply his strength. He concentrates on finishing the glazing, and stays awake to clean out the furnace” (Ecclus 38:29–30).

Jeremiah observed that the vessel was marred in the potter’s hand. Verse four has caused a significant amount of speculation and confusion and, as previously discussed in this thesis, Bible scholars have suggested multiple explanations for the marring of the vessel. Only one explanation is correct based on the text of Scripture and orthodox theology. Four erroneously suggested explanations are as follows: 1) the potter’s wheel was going too fast; therefore, centrifugal force ruined the vessel; 2) the clay was too wet, either the result of poor clay selection by the potter or his working too long with the vessel, therefore the clay lost its strength by absorbing excess water, and the vessel sagged or collapsed; 3) not enough clay was originally selected to form the desired vessel; and 4) the potter lacked skill and ability; therefore, he was not a master potter.⁵ The correct understanding is that the clay had unknown foreign material in it (a stone, piece of hard clay, or chip of wood); and thus, the potter could not continue fashioning the vessel. The first four incorrect explanations fault the potter. The potter, representing the Lord, the Master Potter, then is the cause or reason for man’s sin and wickedness. Theologically, this contradicts the rest of Scripture.⁶ The character of God must not be impugned by false explanations of this text.

⁵ Proponents of these erroneous views are identified and discussed in the two literature review chapters (Chapter Two and Three).

⁶ God is a capable and skilled Creator (Gen. 1–2; Ex. 20; Col. 1). God is holy and good and not the source of evil or sin (Psa. 34:8; 99; Isa. 6:1–5; 57:15). God is all-wise and all-knowing (Psa. 139:16; 147:4; Prov. 8:12–31; Isa. 46:9–11; Acts 15:18). God is all-powerful (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Psa. 33:9; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 1:8; 19:6).

Two textual reasons point to the conclusion that the clay vessel was marred due to the nature of the clay. The first reason is that the verb (שחת) was marred is a *niphal* or reflexive stem of *qal*. It was the clay itself that had the imperfection. In addition to this, was marred in the Hebrew is a waw consecutive perfect, which stresses the statement of fact.⁷

The second reason the clay vessel was marred due to the nature of the clay is the specific prepositional radical (letter) attached as the prefix to the noun, clay, which precedes the phrase in the hand of the potter, is כ and not a כ. ⁸ The כ is the common prepositional prefix indicating in and כ is the common prepositional prefix to stress the causative idea of because or by, indicating reason. There is no textual evidence for a change in the Masoretic Text usage of כ in the place of כ, but a few scholars suggest a textual emendation in Jeremiah 18:4 to indicate the reason for the problem was the potter and not the clay.⁹ Neagelsbach states, “The כ is to be regarded as *kaph veritatis* = as clay, *i.e.*, as he is accustomed to do the clay.”¹⁰ He explains that the clay sometimes fails in the hand of the potter, implying the potter’s hand causes the vessel’s defect. Holladay, in explaining the significance of the textual change, gives the literal meaning, “like clay” → “as clay does” or “as happens with clay” . . . “which of course means ‘as this potter does to the clay.’”¹¹ The understanding with regard to what happens with the clay is a direct result of the

⁷ J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 90–92. Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 193. The significance of the waw consecutive with the perfect is “to denote sequence of consecutive action.”

⁸ The word *clay* is omitted in the *Septuagint*; and therefore, the preposition is associated with the noun *hand* resulting in an even stronger statement of the erroneous explanation when כ is replaced by כ. The hand of the potter becomes the direct cause of the marring rather than the defective clay *in the hand of the potter*.

⁹ Sample of scholars who suggest a textual change of כ to כ in Jer. 18:4 include the following: Bright, *Jeremiah*, 121; Calvin, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 393; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 515; Lunbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 814; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 431.

¹⁰ C. W. Edward Neagelsbach, *Jeremiah*, Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1873), 178.

¹¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 515.

potter, his hands. This is unwarranted and incorrect. It was not the hands of the potter (pushing the wheel too fast, taking too long, using not enough clay, or simply lacking skill) that caused the clay vessel to be marred. The only theologically and grammatically correct conclusion is that as the potter was forming the vessel, the problem within the clay itself was revealed. The character of the clay was faulty not the potter's skill. Feinberg states, "The defects were in the clay, not the hand of the potter."¹² While in the hands of the potter as the vessel was being fashioned, the problem of the clay became apparent. Applied spiritually, man, the clay, is flawed, not the Master Potter's skill.

By way of application, Blackwood assists in understanding the dual meaning of the vessel being marred when he explains, "*Spoiled (nish chath)*: The Hebrew, like the English verb, has two meanings, 'corrupted morally' (example, Gen. 6:11) or 'physically ruined' (example, Gen. 13:7)."¹³ The thrust of how Jeremiah used "marred" in the context of the clay-potter metaphor, is the physical ruin of the vessel, which also points to the moral corruption of Judah. Therefore, due to physical ruin, the vessel needs to be refashioned. If the clay remains pliable, this action can be realized. Yet in Judah's case, the warning was rejected. Jeremiah 19 gives a second illustration of the soon coming severe chastening that became inevitable.

Verse four states that at this point the potter remade the clay into another vessel according to the potter's desire and design. For this to be true, Jeremiah observed the potter removing the clay from the wheel head, smashing it, reworking the clay into a ball. Then the potter placed it back on the wheel and remade the vessel after having removed the foreign matter that had caused the initial problem. The identity of the remade vessel as seemed good (יֵשֶׁר)

¹² Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 491. Guest, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 144. Guest concurs, "Notice it does not say that it was marred by the hand of the potter."

¹³ Blackwood, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 153.

means to be right, straight, or acceptable. This common Old Testament Hebrew word is used both literally and ethically.¹⁴ In the context of the metaphor illustration in Jeremiah 18, both dimensions of this word are brought together. Literally the remade vessel was perfect, no flaws, straight in shape and form as designed by the potter, but also pointed to the ethical application to Judah (brought out in the following verse) and to individuals by application. The original desire and design for the vessel was accomplished.¹⁵ The potter was well pleased with the outcome.

The wrong conclusion concerning the remade vessel obscures the intended application of the clay-potter metaphor in Jeremiah 18. The application Ryken gives illustrates this problem quite well: “The doctrinal point of this passage can be stated very 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 rests all power, rule, control, authority, kingdom, government, and dominion.”¹⁶ This application is true, but not from this passage. The doctrinal point of Jeremiah 18 is that God is willing and able to reshape nations (particularly Judah) and by extension individuals into His intended design and desire if they repent and remain pliable.

That the clay was indeed refashioned is another important detail of the text. The potter does not discard the clay but reworks it until it is a functional vessel. Likewise, the Master Potter does not throw the clay away. Paul reminds us, “Being confident of this very thing, he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

¹⁴ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, S.v. “יָשָׁר,” by Donald J. Wiseman, 417.

¹⁵ Many commentators incorrectly conclude that the potter formed an entirely different vessel in the remaking process. Sample incorrect interpretations: Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 392, “One of a different form”; Gill, *Prophecy of the Old Testament*, 504, “Put it into another form and shape it would better serve”; Gosdeck, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 119, “Into a different kind of pot”; Ryken, *Courage to Stand*, 293, “A different kind of vessel altogether. He turns a pitcher into a bowl or a lamp into a cup”; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 433, “He could make something else from the same clay, but not the particular vessel he had hoped for. The clay could frustrate the potter’s original intention and cause him to change it”. These explanations are completely the opposite of what any master potter would do.

¹⁶ Ryken, *Courage to Stand*, 294.

The next paragraph, Jeremiah 18:5–11, records the third part of this chapter, what Jeremiah heard. At this point the Lord then explained the spiritual significance of the potter’s house object lesson (v. 5). The clay-potter illustration was to be a metaphor to explain God’s relationship with His people (individually and corporately). As clay in the hand of the potter, molded into the potter’s desired shape, so too was God’s desire for men and nations, particularly Judah. As the divine Master Potter, God is in control. This is explained in verse six when Jeremiah records a question and gives the answer. “Cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand.”

Verses eight and ten remind Judah that they are vessels responsible to be faithful and obedient with respect to the Lord, the Master Potter. God had promised the nation through Abraham and reminded the nation through Moses that He was going to bless them, but this blessing was in relationship to their obedience. Though numerous prophets, God had warned Israel in the past and Judah after Israel’s destruction in 722 BC to turn from their sin and evil, or He would chasten them. Psalm 86:5, 15 is a reminder that the Lord is good and ready to forgive, plenteous in mercy and truth. In verse eight the Lord states He would repent or turn from the pronounced chastening if the nation would repent. Babylon who was ready to besiege and invade Judah would be sent home by God. Verse ten reminds Judah that God would and was about to repent and turn from His blessing them because they had failed to obey His Word. “National judgment can be averted by sincere repentance (18:8), but national privilege and blessing can be withdrawn because of evil doing (18:1, 10).”¹⁷

This principle is seen throughout Scripture (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16; Joel 2:12–14; Jonah 4:2). The anthropomorphic language of turning, repenting, and grieving by God is a reminder that God’s eternal plans and purpose do not change, but His

¹⁷ K. Owen White, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 33.

response to man is adaptable. Because God is immutable, He changes not (Zech. 8:19; James 1:17); as man changes, good to evil or evil to good, God responds appropriately due to His unchanging character.

At this point, God has explained the object lesson's significance to Jeremiah, and now instructs Jeremiah to warn the people. "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v. 11). It is important to observe that the call to repentance was directed to much more than just the nation Judah. "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doing good" (v. 11). The Lord through Jeremiah was once again calling the nation to return, but equally apparent is that the focus is upon each individual. Verse eleven clearly identified the individual as where revival begins, "every one from his evil way."

The final division of this chapter records the reception of Jeremiah's message. The initial response of the leaders and inhabitants of Jerusalem was one of hopelessness (v. 12). They incorrectly concluded that the path of sin and rebellion was the only way they could continue, indicating Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem's spiritual state of mind. They no longer made an apology for their sin nor sought to justify themselves.¹⁸ It was their own way ("walk after our own devices") that flowed out of their wicked hearts ("we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart"). What a contrast to the message of warning and hope Jeremiah shared from the potter's house. Judah had concluded she was both the clay and the potter. She thought sin was so ingrained into their daily lives that repentance was impossible, no hope.

Jeremiah responds by repeating the Lord's warning using a different metaphor (vv. 13–17). The virgin Israel (picked up from Jer. 14:17) should have kept herself from idolatry and remained faithful to the Lord just as a chaste unmarried woman keeps herself for her future

¹⁸ White, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 33.

husband. Verses fifteen through seventeen summarize Israel's sin and the Lord's resultant turning of His back.

The final rejection (v. 18) is followed by Jeremiah's reaction (vv. 19–23). The enraged leadership of Jerusalem rose up against Jeremiah and rejected his message. Jeremiah has nowhere to turn but to the Lord and he pleads for protection and vindication (vv. 19–23).

Jeremiah 19 contains a second clay-potter imagery illustration. The Lord gives Judah one last warning. This chapter can be divided into three parts with chapter twenty concluding this eighth sermon in the series of Jeremiah 2:1–25:38 with Judah's final response. First, Jeremiah is instructed to purchase an earthen bottle and gather the leadership in the valley of Hinnom (vv. 1–2). Then the message of pronounced judgment is given (vv. 3–9). Finally, Jeremiah is to break the bottle and give a final warning (vv. 10–15).

A second clay-potter illustration provides a final warning in Jeremiah 19. "The message here is the exact opposite of that in the parable of the potter (18:1–12). There Jeremiah thought that the damaged vessel could be reclaimed: here it cannot."¹⁹ The difference is not the potter: it is the state of the clay, once pliable but now hardened. Jeremiah is instructed to return to the potter's house, not to observe another vessel being formed, but to purchase a specific vessel, an earthen bottle (*baqbuq*).²⁰ He was to gather both the civil leadership ("ancients of the people") and the religious leadership ("ancients of the priests") and escort them into the valley of Hinnom through the east gate. Jeremiah, with an unbroken bottle in his hand, leads Jerusalem's leadership south and west out to the city's garbage dump through what was also called the Potsherd Gate. There Jeremiah was instructed that the Lord would give him the words to tell them.

¹⁹ Blackwood, *Jeremiah*, 158.

²⁰ Onomatopoeitic name for a specific vessel, an expensive narrow-necked bottle which makes a gurgling sound (*baqbuq*) as liquid is poured out. Many authors identify the significance of the name, but few, if any, make the spiritual connection to God's plans for Israel to be His means of blessing the nations.

The message from the Lord recaps Israel's wicked past, which persisted into the present (vv. 3–6) and, resulted in the prophesied invasion of Babylon and siege of Jerusalem (vv. 7–9). Jeremiah's summary of Judah's sin presents five specific reasons for the serious chastening to come: 1) forsook Jehovah (v. 4); 2) burned incense to other gods (v. 4); 3) shed innocent blood (probably a reference to violence and murder of previous prophets [v. 4]); 4) built altars to Baal (v. 5); and 5) offered human sacrifices (v. 5).²¹ Any one of these was sufficient to bring the Lord's chastening. "Even the nations about Judah would have attested to the revolting nature of her acts (v. 13)."²² The inclusion of past infant sacrifices during the reign of Ahaz and Manasseh referred to in the Temple Sermon recorded earlier in Jeremiah (Jer. 7:31) stresses the depth of Israel's sin and idolatry. The terrible wickedness is referenced often in the Old Testament (2 Kings 16:3; 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Psa. 106:37–38; Ezek. 16:20; 20:26; 23:37–39).

At this point Jeremiah is instructed to break the bottle (v. 10) providing a vivid picture of the reason for the Lord's chastening upon Judah. The earthen bottle (בכבכ) was an illustration of the Master Potter's design for Israel. The particular vessel Jeremiah was instructed to purchase, take with him to the valley of Hinnom, and break before Jerusalem's elders had an onomatopoetic name from the gurgling sound (*baqbuq*) made when liquid was poured out of its narrow neck.²³ From the beginning, the vessel God chose to pour out His refreshing, life-giving blessing to the nations was Israel. Genesis 12:2–3 says, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be

²¹ White, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 34.

²² Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 492.

²³ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah*, 256; Dyer, "Jeremiah," 1153; Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 495; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 271; Gill, *Prophets of the Old Testament*, 508; Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 306; King, *Jeremiah*, 171; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 433.

blessed.” The onomatopoetic name for the specific earthen vessel Jeremiah had in his hand and broke reminded Israel of what should have been but because of sin was shattered. Psalm 2:9 reminds us that when God’s people behave like the world, they are treated like the world: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Just as God predicts in this Messianic psalm that unbelieving nations in the Millennium will be broken into potsherds so too Israel, because of her sin and idolatry, will be broken like a potter’s vessel.

The breaking of the bottle is followed by a final warning and plea. Jeremiah is instructed to apply the clay-potter object lesson directly to the people: “Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter’s vessel, that cannot be made whole again” (Jer. 19:11). Verse fifteen states the summary of the reason as, “because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words.” Rather than remaining pliable the Master Potter’s hand (Jer. 18), Judah chose to be hardened by sin and the world and therefore chose to be broken as a potter’s vessel. To use an Old Testament Hebrew poetic idiom, there are three, no four lessons of God’s wrath, chastening, and judgment to be learned from Jeremiah 19. “The wrath of God is just, glorious, and fearsome. To these lessons we must add a fourth based on the good news of the gospel: Jesus Christ is the way to flee from the wrath to come.”²⁴

1 Thessalonians 5:9 makes this very point, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” God’s wrath is just. It is justice that punishes the sins of the people. God’s wrath is glorious. It is both right and good that God punishes His enemies. It glorifies God. God’s wrath is fearsome. Chastening and judgment produce a holy fear, worship, and respect (if not now, in the end [Phil. 2:10–11]). God will have the final word. God’s wrath is also avoidable. “For Jesus Christ has himself has provided a way – the *only* way –

²⁴ Ryken, *Courage to Stand*, 305.

to escape the wrath of God.”²⁵ Paul concludes the thought of 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10 in verse eleven, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

Ryken illustrates the dynamic of this perspective:

The oldest member of the Westminster Assembly, Oliver Bowles, wrote a wise book about evangelical preaching. In it he observed that the doctrine of the wrath of God is preached ‘unto edification, not unto destruction.’ This is as true for evangelism as it is for evangelistic preaching. We do not teach about the eternal judgment of God so that people will be destroyed; we teach it so they might be saved. The wrath of God is just and fearsome, but not inevitable. Jesus Christ provides the way – the only way – to escape the wrath of God. If you are frightened of becoming a vessel of wrath, then trust in Christ for salvation.²⁶

Judah, her leadership both civil and religious, as well as her people rejected the Lord’s warning and passionate plea and thus the time clock of judgment began ticking.

The Chief Governor of the Temple, Pashur, led in Jeremiah’s arrest and persecution and in the rejection of the Lord’s message. “Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD” (Jer. 20:1–2). Feinberg provides insight into the probable reason for Pashur’s severe response as he explains the significance of the breaking of the vessel in Jeremiah 19:10. “The gravity of Jeremiah’s act lay in the fact that it not only illustrated the Lord’s acts but inaugurated them, so to speak. This was more than a dramatization; it was seen as actually activating the Lord’s word of destruction. This explains Pashur’s violent reaction and persecution in Jeremiah 20:1–6.”²⁷ The contrasting messages of chapters 18 and 19 must not be confused or overlooked. Jeremiah was publically ridiculed with feet, hands, and

²⁵ Ryken, *Courage to Stand*, 309.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

²⁷ Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” 498.

neck placed in the stocks. The last of Jeremiah's confessions is recorded in verses 7–10 when Jeremiah expresses his inner feelings. Chapter 20 concludes with Jeremiah's prayer for God's vindication (vv. 11–18).

Two messages placed side by side in Jeremiah 18 and 19. In Chapter 18, God's people are admonished to remain pliable in the hand of the Master Potter. In Chapter 19, God's people are warned that if they persist in sin and worldliness, as a hardened vessel, God will chasten. Submission to the Lord and His Word or stubborn in our own ways are the only two choices.

God as the Master Potter has a desired design for each life. All are sinners and live in a sin-cursed world: therefore there will be problems. God can and will re-fashion everyone who allows the Spirit of God to take the Word of God and identify the problem and remove it through confession and repentance. The key is for each person to remain pliable in the hands of the Master Potter. The result is that each one becomes a vessel of honor, used of the Lord to pour out His blessing through us to others. The question of Jeremiah 18:6, "cannot I do with you as this potter?" is answered at the end of the verse, "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mind hand."

This study of Jeremiah 18 and 19 as a model clay-potter passage presents a correct interpretation and application of this metaphor found in the Old and New Testaments. The divinely-intended implications to be applied in daily Christian life are provided. The Appendix includes additional studies in Genesis, Isaiah, 2 Timothy and 1 Peter. The clay-potter metaphor is not to be ignored, explained superficially, or misinterpreted.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED ADDITIONAL CLAY-POTTER STUDIES

Jeremiah 18 and 19 is probably the most familiar of all clay-potter imagery passages in the Bible. Therefore it was selected as the model passage to be explained and applied in detail with its directness and extensive clay-potter vocabulary references. The Bible contains many additional clay-potter metaphor passages in both the Old and New Testaments. Selected passages will be briefly explained and applied in this Appendix; in the Old Testament, Genesis 2:7 and Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 2:20–21 and 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12; 5:10.

Genesis 2:7

This direct reference to the clay-potter imagery is the first mention of this metaphor in the Bible. At the very outset of Scripture, God used the graphic metaphor of the clay to establish His relationship as the Master Potter to His people. Several commentators and writers, who treat the classic Jeremiah 18 and 19 passage, refer to Genesis 2:7 as the first occurrence of the clay-potter imagery.¹ It is odd, but few who write on Genesis 1 mention a clay-potter connection. Leupold is one example who does mention a clay-potter connection. “The verb employed here accords more with the ‘Yahweh’ character of God; *yatsar* means to ‘mold’ or ‘form.’ It is the word that specifically describes the activity of the potter. (Jer. 18:2 ff). The idea to be emphasized is that

¹ The following commentators make reference to Gen. 2:7 as the first occurrence of the clay-potter metaphor. Ryken, *Courage to Stand*, 294. “The picture of potter and clay is doubly appropriate to describe God’s relationship to us. First, we are made of clay.” Then Ryken refers to Gen. 2:7 and adds, “God was the potter: Adam was the clay. . . . The first thing we learn about our position in the universe is that God is the potter and we are the clay.”; McRay, “Pottery,” 4:1739. “In the creation story God is portrayed as a potter making man from the ground (Gen. 2:7).”; Lunbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 815. “The image of Yahweh as Potter derives from the J story of Creation, where man – also the animals and birds – are formed (*yatsar*) from clay out of the ground (Gen. 2:7–8, 19).”

with the particular care and personal attention that a potter gives to his task God gives tokens of His interest in man, His creature, by molding him as He does.”²

Genesis 1 and 2 is the Lord’s twofold record of the origin of the universe, the earth, and man. By the direct creative act of the eternal God, all that is came into existence, *ex nihilo* in six literal consecutive twenty-four hour days. Genesis 1 stresses the fact of creation, including man, who was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Genesis 2 briefly explains the process of Adam and Eve’s creation (Gen. 2:7, 2:21–22). Therefore Genesis 1 and 2 are not two separate accounts of origins but complimentary chapters that together provide the details of man’s origin. Sailhamer explains the relationship of Genesis 1 and 2 as well as the thrust of chapter two:

At first glance the description of the creation of man here is quite different from that of chapter 1. Man was made ‘from the dust of the ground’ rather than ‘in the image of God’ as in chapter 1. No two descriptions could be more distinct. However, we should not overlook the fact that the topic of the ‘creation of man’ in chapter 2 is not limited merely to v. 7. In fact, the topic of the creation of the man and the woman is the focus of the whole of chapter 2. What the author had stated as a simple fact in chapter 1 (man, male and female, were created in God’s likeness) is explained and developed throughout the narrative of chapter 2. We cannot contrast the depiction of the creation of man in chapter 1 with only one verse in chapter 2; we must compare it to the whole of the chapter.³

In his commentary, Davis begins his explanation by making the clay-potter connection. “God ‘formed’ (*yāʾar*) man. *Yāʾar* means to mold or shape a particular substance. It is used of the pottery shaping pottery (Isa. 29:16; 29:5).”⁴ The creation of man took place in two stages. First, God formed Adam’s human body (physical composition of man) from the dust, from the ground. The dust (עפר) of the ground (אדמה—same root for Adam) is not to be understood as “dry, pulverized earth only, . . . Here, without a doubt, a damp mass of the finest earth is under

² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 115.

³ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:40–41.

⁴ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1975), 76.

consideration. Luther's rendering is still unsurpassed, *Erdenkloss*, lit., 'lump of earth.' The term does not mean 'mud,' as the skeptics irreverently declare."⁵ The root word dust (עפר) is distinct from the more general word earth or territory (ארץ). The Hebrew word for dust (עפר) is also distinct from other less specific words for dust (אבק—specifically referencing dust or soot) and dust (אפר—specifically referencing dust or ashes).⁶ Coupled with the broader term ground (אדמה) that means red or to be red, the common red clay often used by a potter is the intended picture. God then breathed into the lifeless human body, fashioned as a vessel from clay, the breath of life and man (Adam) became a living person (spiritual or immaterial composition of man). The anthropomorphic language of God blowing air into the inert figure He had just molded is a reminder of the truth that life can come only from life. What makes man unique from animals is at the moment man was given life he also reflected the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27).

Therefore man, as a vessel made by God, the Master Potter, directly reflects his maker. Just as the unique personality of every master potter is reflected in each vessel he makes, so too it was on the sixth day of creation. The reason God records that man was formed from the clay, "Lest man form too high an estimate of the first man, . . . in spite of the high station involved in being made in the image of God, man has a constituent part in his makeup, which forever forbids unseemly pride on his part."⁷ On several occasions Scripture reminds its readers that man is from dust and will return to dust (Gen. 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:15; Psa. 103:14; Eccl. 3:20; 12:7). Everyone is warned "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to thin; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). Every person is a

⁵ Leupold, *Genesis*, 115.

⁶ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. S. v. "עפר," by Ronald B. Allen, 687.

⁷ Leupold, *Genesis*, 115.

unique vessel. All are just clay pots (earthen vessels, 2 Cor. 4:7) and at the same time is a unique bearer of the divine image, a vessel to reflect His character and goodness. “Needless to say, the interpretation of Genesis 2:7 is crucial to establishing a biblical anthropology. If it is interpreted incorrectly, the biblical view falls victim to anthropological speculation. To understand man’s origin and fall is to understand his capacities and limitations.”⁸ A significant part of the proper understanding of man, his origin, and balanced limitations and privileges is the clay-potter imagery.

Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah makes three direct references to the clay-potter image. These three passages are interrelated yet distinct. Isaiah is God’s prophet to warn Judah to trust the Lord and not foreign alliances. Isaiah (740–680 BC), like Jeremiah, who lived about one hundred years later (627–585 BC), lived most of his life in Jerusalem. Early in his life Northern Israel was overrun and captured by the Assyrians (722 BC). King Ahaz foolishly began to look to Assyria for protection against Isaiah’s warning from the Lord. The king’s godly son, Hezekiah, instituted spiritual reforms but ill-advisedly looked to Egypt for help. However, God was gracious and protected Judah from the Assyrian king, Sennacherib who conquered Egypt. Judah’s next king, Manasseh, led Judah to the depths of wickedness and idolatry. Tradition states that Isaiah was martyred during Manasseh’s reign, possibly being sawed in two inside a hollow log (Heb. 11:37). The rather long and varied ministry of Isaiah included several messages that used the clay-potter imagery to illumine divine truth to Judah.

⁸ Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 77.

Isaiah 29:16

The specific context of Isaiah 29 is a series of woes and blessings (28:1–35:10). The prophet pronounces these woes and blessings toward the conclusion of the first half of the book of Isaiah, The Denunciations (1:1–39:8). The specific focus of Isaiah 29:1–24 is Judah’s hypocrisy.

After warning of the siege and burning judgment upon Jerusalem (vv. 1–4), Isaiah changes the tone and thought in verses five to eight, moving forward in time to the Tribulation judgment of Judah’s enemies. The prophet returns to address Judah and refers to the spiritual blindness and lack of concern over their sin resulting in the Lord giving them “the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes” (v. 10). In the next two verses the people’s insensitivity to spiritual matters is illustrated by the metaphor of a sealed book (vv. 11–12). “The whole point of vv. 11–12 is that Isaiah’s own God-given vision was a closed book to the people of Jerusalem.”⁹

At this point, Isaiah uses the clay-potter imagery to rebuke Judah’s empty religious ritual. Judah had given only mouth and lip service to the Lord in worship, but their heart was removed far from the Lord (v. 13). Judah thought they could make a secret alliance with Egypt, acting as if their plans and efforts are hidden from the Lord. The rebuke is clear; Judah was thinking backward (“turning of things upside down,” v. 16). Isaiah explains that just as the potter’s clay, “shall the work [the clay] say to him that made it [the potter], He made me not?” (v. 16). The answer to the rhetorical question is no. Judah is condemned for rejecting God and His plans. The clay cannot deny the potter who made it nor his control of the affairs related to the vessel. Young states, “Man is like clay. He was made; he did not make himself.”¹⁰ Judah engaged in empty,

⁹ G. W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:188.

¹⁰ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1965), 2:324.

ceremonial worship but lived and planned as if they did not need God. The New Testament warns in 2 Timothy 3:5, “Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

Isaiah 45:9

The context of the second clay-potter imagery passage is in the first section of Isaiah’s Consolation (40:1–64:12). “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Isa. 40:1). The second half of Isaiah begins with a statement of the greatness of God which is the reason for Judah’s comfort (40:1–48:22). Isaiah announces Judah’s release from future captivity (40:1–11). At this point, the Lord, the God of creation (40:12–31) is contrasted to impotent idols (41:1–29). The Lord will not only release Judah but will also send His Servant (42:1–25, a prelude to the Great Messianic Suffering Servant passage of 49:1–57:21) and restore all of Israel (43:1–44:28).

At this point, the prophet’s message becomes quite specific as Isaiah identifies the Lord’s anointed as Cyrus (45:1ff, not to be confused with The Anointed One of the line of David in the distant future). Cyrus is the Lord’s shepherd for temporal deliverance in Judah’s near future (44:28). “Cyrus is set apart for the task of restoring the Jews to their land. He is God’s ‘anointed’ in the sense of being chosen to accomplish His will with regard to the Jews.”¹¹

To answer Israel’s complaint against God’s using an ungodly king to do His work, Isaiah uses the clay-potter metaphor. Isaiah pronounces a woe upon Judah for accusing “God of using inappropriate means to achieve his ends.”¹² Anyone who strives, argues with his maker is foolish. He is like “a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth . . . simply an ordinary piece of

¹¹ Young, *Isaiah*, 3:203.

¹² Peter A. Stevenson, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 23), 391.

pottery [which has been broken and no longer whole] which has been made of clay.”¹³ The rebuke continues with two additional rhetorical questions: “Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or they work, He hath no hands?” (Isa. 45:9). Paul picks this up in Romans 9:20–21 and stresses the foolishness of questioning God’s ways, God is the potter Who exercises His will over every lump of clay. Hebrew or Gentile, Old Testament era or the Church age, it is always foolish to question God’s ways. His ways are above and beyond man’s ways and understanding (Isa. 55:8–9). He is the Potter; man is mere clay.

Isaiah 64:8

After the Messianic Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 49:1–57:21, Isaiah sets forth God’s eschatological program of peace. The glories of the Millennial Kingdom are enumerated in chapter sixty. The ministry of Messiah and the restoration of Israel are explained in chapters 61–62. In Isaiah 63:1–65:16, the prerequisites for the Lord’s blessing are identified. Isaiah uses the clay-potter imagery again to illustrate the Lord’s point. Finally Judah had resigned and surrendered to the Lord’s warning and consolation. Isaiah uses the clay-potter metaphor to express Judah’s final surrender: “But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8). Judah is now aware of her ill-advised past choices and seeks the Lord’s mercy. “The people cast themselves on the mercy of God, calling on him to remember, not their sins, but their standing as his people (v. 9).”¹⁴ Young summarizes well the implication of the use of the clay-potter metaphor: “Clay, therefore, refers to what is mean and lowly; and God as potter has sovereign disposition over the clay; from this

¹³ Grogan, “Isaiah,” 6:271.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6:344.

clay He has molded His people, who now confess that He is their Father.”¹⁵ The Lord desires every believer not only to recognize and surrender to His gracious working in their lives as the Master Potter, but also then to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him also as Father.

2 Timothy 2:20–21

Paul includes the clay-potter imagery in 2 Timothy 2:20–21 within the context of his sevenfold portrait of the believer. 2 Timothy 2 begins with the portrait of a foot soldier (vv. 3–4). The lesson is that the believer is to be focused by avoiding entanglements of the world so he can endure hardness because endurance is required of a Christian. The athlete is the second snapshot of the believer (v. 5). The focus is on the discipline necessary to live the Christian life. The goal of discipline is to strive for masteries which can be accomplished only by competing in the proper manner, to strive lawfully (2 Tim. 2:5, cf. 1 Cor. 9:25–27). Often the New Testament uses the illustration of running a race, boxing, or wrestling to graphically portray the need of diligent discipline of every believer. The third portrait is a farmer or husbandman (vv. 6–9). The emphasis of this metaphor is patience. Just as one cannot rush a crop, it takes time to produce spiritual fruit. The Christian needs to be patient with himself as well as others. The husbandman metaphor also illustrates the necessity of work; the Christian life takes labor.

The fourth portrait of the believer returns to the military arena of life. The metaphor of the commanding officer (vv. 10–13) presents two aspects essential to an effective, efficient walk with the Lord and ministry to others. The first is consideration of the whole body of Christ (whole army, v. 11), and the second is complete trust in the Commander-in-Chief (vv. 11–13). Every believer, especially those in positions of leadership, must be aware and considerate of others. The military officer who thinks only of himself is disloyal and undependable. This is

¹⁵ Young, *Isaiah*, 3:498.

balanced by a commitment to the direction of God's Word because it is Christ who gives the victory (1 Jn. 5:4). This is followed by a fifth picture of a biblical Christian, a craftsman or workman (vv. 14–18). Again two points of focus are stressed. The first concept stressed is diligence, from the root concept of study which means to be zealous, so that he is not ashamed when his workmanship is inspected. Coupled with this concept is a second focus that is preciseness. Positively indicated by rightly divide, literally meaning to cut along a straight line. It is crucial for each believer to handle God's Word correctly. Paul adds a negative explanation of precision with the warning to avoid godless chatter and empty testimonies (such as the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus). The final metaphor in 2 Timothy 2 is a servant (slave) that clearly projects the absolute necessity of selflessness (vv. 24–26). The Christian must not advocate or advance his own will or agenda. The servant's sole focus is on the Master, willing to do whatever needs to be done.

The sixth portrait in the passage uses the clay-potter metaphor, a house filled with vessels, vessels of honor (vv. 19–22). The main idea is that the believer is to be sanctified, prepared, and useable. Every household contains many vessels or utensils, but only set apart, clean vessels can be used. Paul reminds Timothy that a choice must be made.

The great household of the Lord (v. 20) is built on a foundation that must stand firm and steadfast (θεμλίος, v. 19). This is an allusion to the practice of placing a stone with an inscription on it indicating the purpose of the building and all other stones relate to that key stone. The great household is the household of God, the church, made up of true believers. In order for this foundation to be firm, steadfast, and strong, it is necessary to depart from iniquity. In the immediate context the focus is on false teaching that overthrows the faith of others and

thus leads to ungodliness. Two specific examples of false teaching are mentioned, Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16–18).

Paul explains that in this great house are two types of vessels. These vessels are identified in two ways, first by the material they are made of and then by the value of that material. Some vessels are made of gold and silver which are to honour. The other vessels are made of wood and earth (clay vessels) which are to dishonour (v. 20). The key to properly understanding the clay-potter imagery metaphor in this passage (Rom. 9:20–21 as well) is the specific words used for honour and dishonour in the text. The word for honour is τιμή and dishonour is ἀτιμία. It is the same root word τιμή with the alpha privative that negates the concept and presents a contrastive comparison or opposite meaning. The selected root word concept means price, value, honour, respect, as used in secular Greek, worth, value, price in relationship to things.¹⁶ This word has a very close connection with δόξα (glory); the main difference between the two words is that δόξα is used of God whereas τιμή applies to man and used of things often referring to price or value.¹⁷ Vine also explains the distinction between and word families with τιμή meaning “primarily ‘a valuing,’ hence objectively, . . . of ‘the preciousness of Christ’ unto believers, 1 Pet. 2:7, . . . the honor and inestimable value of Christ as appropriated by believers.”¹⁸ Applied to 2 Timothy 2:20–21, the vessels of gold and silver have inestimable value compared to the vessels of wood and earth (clay). Aalen adds that in both “Gk. Society and the OT, *timē* is also used in the context of the social order decreed by God. *timē* is respect for the standing and task of a person who has his place in this order. When it is applied to things, it means the recognition of

¹⁶ Sverre Aalen, “τιμή,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:49.

¹⁸ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 310.

the value something has according to recognized norms . . . The distinctive distribution of honour among things of varying worth is important.”¹⁹ Therefore in the context of 2 Timothy 2:20–21, $\tau\mu\alpha$ ($\tau\mu$ with the added alpha privative) the concept of distinctive value is stressed between the two type of vessels listed, gold and silver compared to wood and earth. The recognized norms for evaluation are obvious, precious metals compared to coarse materials such as wood and earth (clay).²⁰ Adeney in his comments on the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18:1–6 explains this distinction well: “The potter has the power to leave the clay untouched or make out of it either a vessel of honour or a vessel of dishonour, a beautiful vase or an ugly piece of crockery, a dainty cup for a prince’s banquet or a coarse culinary utensil.”²¹ Vine explains that the vessels of dishonour are “vessels designed for meaner household purposes.”²² In referring to the potter remolding the vessel in Jeremiah 18, Exell provides the proper understanding for honour-dishonour, “The Potter would feign return and mould and re-mould till the vessel is fit for some use, high or noble, in the great house of which He is the Supreme Head.”²³ High or humble is an excellent way to identify different uses of vessels made from the same clay, the idea of special or common. Therefore the vessels of gold and silver are reserved, or seldom used (only for special occasions), whereas the vessels of wood and earth (clay) are the daily, commonly used vessels.

¹⁹ Aalen, “ $\tau\mu\alpha$,” 2:50.

²⁰ Hans-Georg Link, “ $\alpha\sigma\chi\eta$,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:562-564. It is interesting that the common misconception for the meaning of $\tau\mu\alpha$ – “same or shameful” is not listed in this volume under shame, only the various cognates of $\alpha\sigma\chi\eta$ – “shame, disgrace, ugly.”

²¹ W. F. Adeney, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 11 of *Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1950), 444.

²² Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, 173.

²³ Joseph S. Exell, “Jeremiah 1,” in *The Biblical Illustrator*, (Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, n.d.), 9:410.

This is exactly the way God has chosen to accomplish His work. “For ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; . . . that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:26–27, 1:31). Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church writes, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7). What a privilege to be clay pots containing the precious treasure of the gospel and the Word of God (2 Cor. 4:6) to minister to the world.

An important stipulation in 2 Timothy 2:20–21 must be met to be a vessel unto honour and meet for the master’s use. Each vessel, regardless of its material make up (gold-silver or wood-clay), must be sanctified as a result of purging. The action called for is purging (from καθαίρω, aor. act. subjunctive 3 p. sing). The verb chosen is the compound intensive form of καθαίρω to clean, make clean, thus to cleanse thoroughly.²⁴ The form of the verb (aorist subjunctive) stresses a command that is to be carried out completely by the individual.

The object of the purging is these. In the context, it is a reference back to iniquity (v. 19) and the false teachers, specifically identified as Hymenaeus and Philetus (v. 17). It is not a reference back to of wood and of earth (v. 20). The proper understanding of honour and dishonour in verse twenty has already been explained. It is not a moral evaluation, but rather a reference to the objective value of the vessels based upon the material they are made of.

The result is threefold: 1) unto honour, 2) sanctified, and 3) meet for the master’s use. Honour (τιμή) in God’s household is the result of purging or cleansing. All vessels, whether

²⁴ Hans-Georg Link and Johannes Schattenmann, “καθαίρω,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:102.

gold-silver or wood-clay, can be used of the Lord if they are free of iniquity and false teaching. When cleansed, the vessel is sanctified (ἁγίος), set apart, the root word is holy. Every vessel must be holy because the God to Whom it belongs and is used by is holy. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15–16). The holy God to whose household the believer belongs must be a holy, set apart vessel.

The third result is that the vessel is meet for the master’s use. The idea of meet (εὔχρηστον) is fit or useable. The word selected is from the root χρᾶσταις and is connected with “the Hebrew word *tôb* in its many shades of meaning . . . expressing the abundance of good which God in his → covenant of faithfulness displays to his people and to all men as his creatures.”²⁵ The Lord, the Master, desires to use common clay vessels to dispense His blessing to His people and all men. This was God’s design for Israel but because of their sin and stiff-neckedness, they had to be broken and set aside (Jer. 18–19). The Lord has selected believers to accomplish His work in the Church Age but only if the believers are purged and sanctified.

1 Peter

1 Peter contains three indirect references to the clay-potter imagery in reference to fiery trials. Many commentators identify the fiery trials as the testing and refining of metal.²⁶ This is possible, but equally possible is the reference to the clay-potter imagery. After vessels are formed, finished, and dried, they are placed in a kiln to be purified and strengthened for use.

²⁵ Erich Beyreuther, “χρηστῆς,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:105.

²⁶ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1990), 57, 164–65; Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1988), 63, 178; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1984), 68, 284; Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 48, 173; Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 45, 192.

There were as many or more kilns throughout the biblical world as precious metal refining furnaces. Both metaphors draw upon the use of extreme heat to purify the material. The fourfold description of the results of the exposure to the significant heat fits the clay-potter imagery better than the smelting process of precious metals such as gold and silver. Both clay and gold-silver are purified in the process, but only clay is firmed and strengthened. This will be explained in the comments on 1 Peter 5:10.

The theme of 1 Peter is developed around two prominent words, grace and glory. It is in God's grace that believers stand and bring glory to God (1 Pet. 5:12). 1 Peter develops this theme through a believer's fivefold progression from salvation to service. Man's salvation involves more than a future passage to heaven; it also includes serving God and others now.

God's grace in salvation results in the believer's security (1:1–12). After salvation, it is necessary that the believer is sanctified by God's grace which results in purity (1:13–2:10). To be used by the Lord, humility is required. Therefore the next step in the progression of 1 Peter is experiencing God's grace in submission (2:11–3:12). Only at this point is the believer prepared to grow to maturity. This is accomplished through God's grace in suffering (3:13–4:19). The final result is that the believer is a vessel of honor, meet for the master's use (2 Tim. 2:21). Effectiveness and productivity in life and ministry results from God's grace in service (5:1–14).

The goal for each believer, a vessel in the Lord's hands, is to glorify Him through our service. The path to service necessitates trial by fire to purify and strengthen for service. The clay-potter metaphor used to depict the trying of the believer's faith is the clay vessel after being fashioned is placed into the kiln to be purified and strengthened. This is brought out in three particular verses in 1 Peter (1:7; 4:12; and 5:10).

1 Peter 1:7

The context of 1 Peter 1:7 is Peter's explanation of how God's grace is necessary as a means of security in salvation. The believer is born of God because of the finished cross work of Christ (v. 3). The believer's reserved home in heaven is secure (v. 4) and constantly guarded by the power of God until the day of the believer's home going and glorification (v. 5). It is within the doxological introduction that Peter brings in the clay-potter imagery to address the question, "What about the trials and suffering of this present life?"

Peter reminds believers that the appropriate response is to greatly rejoice (v. 6). He provides two reasons to rejoice. First, the trial of your faith is now for a season (v. 6). Just as the vessel placed in the kiln does not remain in the kiln exposed to the intense heat forever, the believer's testing is only for a season. The trial of the believer's faith is a predetermined time and controlled by God, the Master Potter. It is a comfort to know that the Lord has His hand on the clock during the difficult times of life. Paul reminds the believer that God also has His hand on the thermostat. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Both the time and the temperature are controlled by God, the Master Potter, just like the potters and experienced kilnmen of Palestine in the Old and New Testament world.

The second reason for rejoicing is indicated in the phrase, *if need be*. The idea is the heaviness through manifold temptations is necessary (v. 6). "*If need be* may simply recognize that such an experience is a possibility, i.e. circumstances may make it inevitable."²⁷ Barnes provides a more forceful interpretation: "This phrase seems to have been thrown in here to

²⁷ Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1959), 77.

intimate that there was a necessity for their afflictions, or that there was ‘need’ that they should pass through these trials. There was some good to be accomplished by them, which made it desirable and proper that they should be thus afflicted.”²⁸ A full explanation of the necessity for the trial by fire is indicated in verse seven (introduced by the $\square\upsilon\alpha$ clause). God knows at times it is necessary to test and try the believer’s faith. This exposure to the fire is good. This goodness is described as precious ($\tau\iota\mu\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$, related to the word used in 2 Tim. 2:20–21 with the idea of costly, even more costly than gold!). The good results produce praise, honour, and glory when this life is over. The kiln experience of God’s vessel is good and lasting. Gold’s value will perish, but the testing of the believer’s faith will endure. Therefore the many varied fiery trials of the believer are to be a cause of rejoicing.

1 Peter 4:12

At the end of the fourth stage of the believer’s development for service for the Lord, Peter uses the clay-potter metaphor again. Beginning in 1 Peter 3:13, Peter addresses God’s grace in suffering by reminding the believer of Christ’s suffering for the believer and therefore ought to “arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (4:1). The believer’s reaction to the trials of suffering is then explained (4:7–19). In the midst of this explanation, the believer is reminded that it is common to be tested by the fiery trials of life (vv. 12–16).

Specifically in verse twelve, the believer is to have the correct perspective. It is not a strange thing (both the adjective $\xi\sigma\upsilon\upsilon\omicron\nu$ and verb $\xi\epsilon\nu\sigma\tau\epsilon\theta\epsilon$ are used in this verse). The idea from these two words is don’t be surprised as if something unusual has happened. The passive voice with the negative ($\mu\iota$) of the verb stresses the idea don’t be caught off guard, especially since you did not cause the trial and therefore it could not be anticipated. There are several other

²⁸ Albert Barnes, *James, Peter, John, and Jude*, Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), 115.

possible words that could be used (ἑτεροῦς, “belonging to another, not his own”; παρὰδοξος, “contrary opinion”; ἑξω, “outside, foreign”). The use of ἐν ἑμῷ and ἐξ ὑμῶν emphasize that the fiery trials are not a stranger but rather “belong to the Christian’s lot.”²⁹ The absence of opposition, spiritual warfare, would be strange.

Again the proper response to the fiery trials is rejoicing (v. 13). The reason for the rejoicing is that in the trial the believer partakes of Christ’s suffering. The world can no longer see Christ incarnate but must see His Body, individual believers in the Church, displaying Christlikeness even through trials so that He can be glorified (vv. 14, 16). Peter reminds each believer that the cause for opposition and suffering is not personal sin (v. 15) but is a sign of an obedient Christian (vv. 16, 19).

1 Peter 5:10

Peter concludes his book with a final reminder for the believer to lean upon the Lord’s grace, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7) and that it is “the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Pet. 5:10). At this point, Peter summarizes the fourfold necessity of suffering through the fiery trials to “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (v. 10). The believer’s calling is to be purified and strengthened vessels to serve and glorify Him. All four descriptions of the resultant qualities of the believer-vessel are in the future tense and constitute divine promises. Lenski states the end result of these promises, “The future tenses are not optatives of wish, A.V., but indicate assurance. They are not merely futuristic: ‘shall equip,’ etc., but voluntative: ‘will equip.’”³⁰

²⁹ Hans Bietenhard, “ἐξ ὑμῶν,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 1:689.

³⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 228.

The first resultant quality of fiery trials is perfect (καταρτίζει from καταρτιζω). The compound Greek word from ἁρτιος with the basic meaning suitable, complete, or sound is “the oldest derivative in cl. Gk. . . . [meaning] to put in order, restore, furnish, prepare, equip.”³¹ “The focus is on their character. . . . through their suffering God will produce a fully restored or confirmed character in them.”³² The idea of perfect is that the trial of their faith will “‘make them fully prepared and complete’ with respect to any resource or ability which they have lost through this suffering.”³³ This concept fits the clay-potter metaphor better than the refining fire of precious metal. Applied to the clay-potter imagery, the result of the fiery trial is what type of vessel they will become, everything put in order.

The second descriptive result of fiery trials is stablish (στηριξει from στηριζω). Elsewhere in the New Testament his word is translated establish. The basic concept is particularly appropriate to the clay-potter metaphor. F. B. Meyer explains and applies the concept in this context as the Lord “shall found you so massively on the Rock of the person and work of the Lord Jesus that when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon you, you may not fall, because rooted and grounded in him.”³⁴ The difference between the vessel formed of clay that is either unfired or fired is crucial. Unfired clay is not stablished; it is very weak and fragile. Significant moisture and water causes the clay vessel to return to a puddle of mud. The slightest blow will crack and crumble the unfired pottery vessel.

³¹ Reinier Schippers, “ἁρτιος,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 3:349.

³² Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 195.

³³ Grudem, *First Epistle of Peter*, 198.

³⁴ F. B. Meyer, *Tried by Fire: Exposition of First Peter* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1977), 203.

After the fiery trial of the kiln, water cannot damage the vessel. The strength and durability of the vessel is greatly improved. “The idea is that God will make them firm in their faith.”³⁵

The third word selected to identify the result of the fiery trial of one’s faith is strengthen (σθενσαι from σθενω). During the fiery trial, the Lord “may not take away the suffering or the temptation, but he will give more grace, communicating his own strength; so that the soul may even glorify God for infirmities and trials.”³⁶ The concept basic to the theological implication of the use of σθενσαι is that through the kiln experience the Master Potter imparts His divine strength to the vessel. Stibbs connects the previous establish with this strengthening for divinely intended ministry, “The sequence of thought would then be that God will first establish them firmly in their own personal faith or give them strength to stand firm; and then empower them for active service, or give them strength to go on.”³⁷

This word is distinct from δυναμις / δυναμω, which emphasizes strength-power, ισχυς / ισχω, which stresses strength-ability or might, and κρατος / κραταιω, which underscores the idea of strength-force or dominion. Of all the possible word choices, σθενσαι “is quite an unusual word meaning ‘to make strong.’ . . . [it is] only in 3 Mac. 3:8 and rarely in secular Greek.”³⁸ Of the four descriptive words in 1 Peter 5:10, σθενσαι is least likely to reference the purifying of metal. Gold, in particular, when purified is not stronger but softer or weaker. On the other hand, the extreme temperatures of the kiln both purify and strengthen the clay vessel.

³⁵ Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 195.

³⁶ Meyer, *First Peter*, 203.

³⁷ Stibbs, *First Epistle General of Peter*, 174.

³⁸ Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 196.

The final resultant quality of fiery trials enumerated in 1 Peter 5:10 is settle (θεμελιώσει from θεμελιώ). The basic concept of the character development resulting from the fiery trials is to be firmly placed, [*settle*] “in any rightful place from which the suffering has wrongfully removed them.”³⁹ “This is an image of security, of people who cannot be moved no matter what comes against them”⁴⁰ The believer-vessel, having passed through the fiery trial, is firmly placed into service and is secure and confident, having been purified and strengthened. The matter of preparation is settled. Davids summarizes the composite impact of these four descriptive results that prepare the believer for service:

What Peter has done is pile up a number of closely related terms that together by their reinforcing one another give a multiple underscoring of the goal that God is intending for them and even more is producing in their suffering. . . . Thus our author rounds out the body of the letter with a short doxology: ‘To him is power forever. Amen.’ This is an abbreviation of the doxology found in 4:11, . . . which is itself an exaltation of God, there is no need for more. . . . The one who has planned and promised is also the one to whom belongs the power to fulfill.⁴¹

From salvation to service, passing through sanctification, submission, and suffering, each believer experiences God’s grace as a clay vessel fashioned, purified, and strengthened by the Master Potter. The fiery trials are good because after being tried, the vessel is found honorable and useful (1 Pet. 1:7). Believers must expect fiery trials. It is common, not strange, to be tested by the fire of trials (1 Pet. 4:17). Fiery trials are necessary to develop qualities of usefulness for service, perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle (1 Pet. 5:10). God, the Master Potter, is providentially involved in all stages of the believer’s life, from forming to refining so that each believer-vessel is more than an earthen vessel (clay pot) but a vessel of honour fit for the Master’s use.

³⁹ Grudem, *First Epistle of Peter*, 198.

⁴⁰ Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 196.

⁴¹ Ibid.

APPENDIX B
SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Letter to Participating Church

Date

Pastor's Name
Church Name
Address 1
Address 2

Dear Pastor:

Enclosed are the questionnaires and consent forms we discussed in our recent conversation relative to gathering information for my Doctor of Ministries thesis. You, as Pastor, and your church as well as each adult individual (18 years and above) that participates will remain anonymous.

Please distribute the questionnaires and attached consent forms at an appropriate time to anyone in your church who is willing to participate. Please instruct all participants to read the consent form before completion of the questionnaire. A suggested time for distribution would be the evening Sunday service. Collect the completed questionnaires and return to me in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. The consent forms are to be kept by participants for their records. The questionnaires are to be completed by adults only (18 and older).

Thank you for your willingness to assist in the gathering of information that will enable me to complete this aspect of my Doctor of Ministry thesis.

Sincerely in His Service,

Dr. Karl Stelzer

Questionnaire: Clay-Potter Imagery
Dr. Karl Stelzer, Pensacola Theological Seminary

Before completing this questionnaire, please read the attached Consent Form. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information related to the clay-potter imagery used in the Bible. Your Pastor, church, and you as an individual will remain anonymous (Please do not sign the questionnaire). Please answer all questions – circle your answer for each multiple choice question. Thank you for assisting by completing this questionnaire.

1. In Jeremiah 18, what was the probable cause for the “clay being marred”?
 - A. Potter’s wheel going too fast – centrifugal force
 - B. Clay too wet – lost strength and sagged
 - C. Foreign material in clay – stone, chip of wood
 - D. Not enough clay for desired vessel
 - E. Potter’s inability – lack of skill

2. How many clay-potter passages are there in the Bible (direct reference and/or allusions)?
 - A. 0
 - B. 1 or 2
 - C. 3 to 9
 - D. 10 or more

3. Where are the clay-potter passages located in the Bible?
 - A. Not aware of any
 - B. In the Old Testament only
 - C. In the New Testament only
 - D. In both the Old and New Testament

4. Have you ever seen a potter work on a potter’s wheel?
 - A. Never
 - B. Once or twice
 - C. Several times
 - D. I have myself

5. If B, C, or D answer for #4, explain circumstances (place and time)?

6. Have you ever seen a Christian potter demonstration?
 - A. Never
 - B. Once or twice
 - C. Several times
 - D. I have given one

7. If B, C, or D answer for #6, explain circumstances (where and time)?

8. What question do you have related to clay-potter passage(s)?

CONSENT FORM

Doctor of Ministry Thesis

Clay-Potter Imagery in the Bible: Theological and Practical Implications for Daily Christian Life

Dr. Karl Stelzer

Liberty University

Theological Seminary and Graduate School

You are invited to be in a research study of clay-potter imagery in the Bible. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an attender of this church. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Dr. Karl Stelzer, Doctor of Ministry candidate at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the need for clay-potter instruction in local churches.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

Complete the attached questionnaire and return to your pastor who will send it to the researcher.

Completion of the questionnaire should take less than five minutes of your time.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. If there is a breach of confidentiality, there is a minimal risk to one's reputation. However, as a participant no signature is required, and the pastor, church, and individuals will remain anonymous. There are no individual benefits or compensation from participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a locked file box and only the researcher will have access to the records. After three years, questionnaires will be shredded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your local church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Dr. Karl Stelzer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at Pensacola Christian College, (850) 478-8480, ext. 3234 or drkastelzer@bellsouth.net.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

APPENDIX C

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Clay-Potter Imagery in the Bible: Theological and Practical Implications for daily Christian life



Karl Stelzer



General Problem

God, the Master-Potter, often uses the clay-potter imagery in the Bible to explain truth.

The author of this thesis has observed that these passages:

- ... have been ignored,**
- ... explained superficially,**
- ... or misinterpreted quite often.**

- Benjamin Keach (1604-1704) *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible*.
- E. W. Bullinger (1968) *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*.
- Majority of commentaries – little or nothing ...

Specific examples of misinterpretation given in Chapters 2 and 3.

Two Reasons for the Problem

- **Many have theological training but lack technical potter knowledge.**
- **Christian potters with pottery experience lack formal Bible training.**

Hypothesis (Ch 1): “The clay-potter passages in the Bible have not had the divinely intended personal impact upon the people of the church.” – clay-potter “metaphor has been slighted or misinterpreted and thus has not spiritually benefited the individuals of the American church.”

Christian potters who lack formal Bible training often handle these passages incorrectly.

Researcher's Credentials

- **Professional Potter**

- Learned the potter trade at Bluffton College
- Taught at Art Institute, College, High School levels
- Master-Potter by trade
- Displayed and demonstrated pottery throughout US
- Christian Pottery Conferences for about 30 years

- **Trained Pastor ... Bible Instructor**

- B.A.; M.Div.; Th.M.; Ph.D. in Bible and Theology
- Pastor for 16 years
- Christian Day School teacher for 7 years
- College and Seminary professor for 16 years

After several years of Bible and pottery occupying distinct areas of my life, in the mid-80s I realized I should share the multiple insights that pottery brought to the Scriptures.

Not an accidental relationship – clay-pottery to the Bible

Preaching/teaching at Christian camps, schools, churches, Christian college chapel

Specific Problem

- **Assessment of clay-potter knowledge of individuals in churches**
- **Assessment of the formal literature**
- **Assessment of the popular literature**

Collectively these assessments verify the observations made – the clay-potter passages in the Bible are ignored, superficially explained, or misinterpreted.

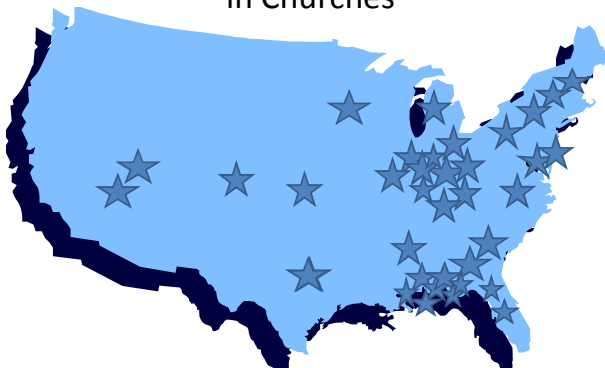
Specific Problem – Assessed by comparative analysis

Significant sampling/assessment by questionnaire

Literature review – commentaries, journal articles

Literature review – popular presentations

Assessment of Individuals in Churches



Not a local/regional sampling/assessment

Geographical depiction:

- 38 churches
- 20 different states
- Over 2,000 questionnaires

3 Objectives for Assessing What Individuals Know

- To demonstrate there is a significant ignorance or unawareness of the frequency and importance of the clay-potter imagery usage in the Bible.
- To establish the fact that the Bible's clay-potter imagery has been ignored, superficially explained, or misrepresented.
- To show that preaching/teaching the clay-potter passages in the church context will:
 - Raise the awareness of the frequency and importance
 - Lead to these passages being clarified and expanded
 - Verify how these passages spiritually impact lives

Two Groups Assessed

Group A Conference Churches	Group B Non-Conference Churches
18	20
1,023	1,008
Total Individuals – 2,031	
Total Churches – 38 from 20 different states	



Research methodology: *Respondents* – two groups of individuals were asked to complete a one page questionnaire. Group A – Individuals from churches where I held a clay-pottery conference. Group B – Individuals from churches where I did not hold a clay-pottery conference. *Questionnaire* – Single page questionnaire developed which focused on the key clay-potter imagery passage of Jeremiah 18-19. *Procedure* – Pastors of churches were contacted requesting participation; conferences were scheduled and held where questionnaires were completed at the conclusion of the conference. For non-conference churches, questionnaires were sent, completed, and returned.

Question 1

In Jeremiah 18, what was the probable cause for the “clay being marred”?

- A. Potter's wheel going too fast – centrifugal force
- B. Clay too wet – lost strength and sagged
- C. Foreign material in clay – stone, chip of wood
- D. Not enough clay for desired vessel
- E. Potter's inability – lack of skill

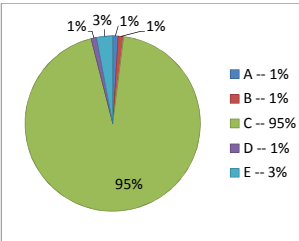
Group A	Group B
• A. 1%	• A. 8%
• B. 1%	• B. 17%
• C. 95% (correct answer)	• C. 47%
• D. 1%	• D. 7%
• E. 3%	• E. 23%

Question 1

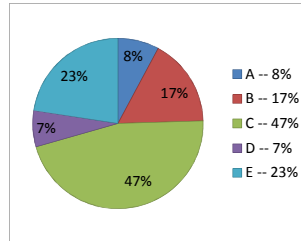
In Jeremiah 18, what was the probable cause for the "clay being marred"?

- A. Potter's wheel going too fast – centrifugal force
- B. Clay too wet – lost strength and sagged
- C. Foreign material in clay – stone, chip of wood
- D. Not enough clay for desired vessel
- E. Potter's inability – lack of skill

Group A



Group B



Question 2

How many clay-potter passages are there in the Bible (direct reference and/or allusions)?

- A. 0
- B. 1 or 2
- C. 3 to 9
- D. 10 or more

Group A

- A. 0%
- B. 2%
- C. 15%
- D. 84% (correct answer)

Group B

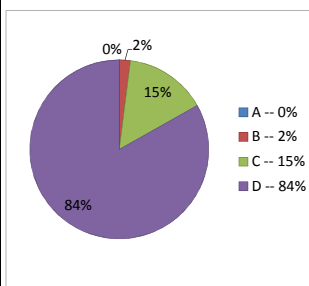
- A. 0%
- B. 43%
- C. 47%
- D. 11%

Question 2

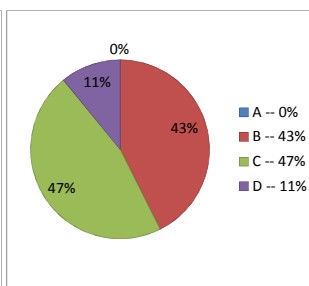
How many clay-potter passages are there in the Bible (direct reference and/or allusions)?

- A. 0
- B. 1 or 2
- C. 3 to 9
- D. 10 or more

Group A



Group B



Question 3

Where are the clay-potter passages located in the Bible?

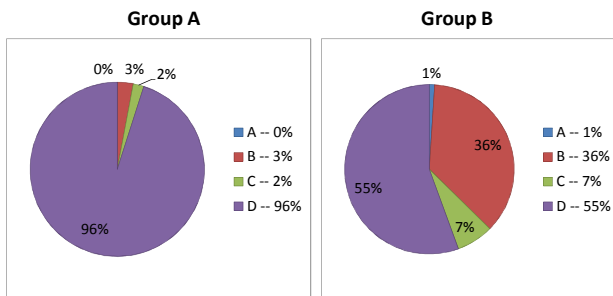
- A. Not aware of any
- B. In the Old Testament only
- C. In the New Testament only
- D. In both the Old and New Testaments

Group A		Group B	
• A. 0%		• A. 1%	
• B. 3%		• B. 36%	
• C. 2%		• C. 7%	
• D. 96% (correct answer)		• D. 55%	

Question 3

Where are the clay-potter passages located in the Bible?

- A. Not aware of any
- B. In the Old Testament only
- C. In the New Testament only
- D. In both the Old and New Testaments



Question 4 and 6

Question 4 – Have you ever seen a potter work on a potter's wheel?

Question 6 – Have you ever seen a Christian potter demonstration?

- A. Never
- B. Once or twice
- C. Several times
- D. I have myself

Group A		Group B	
#4	#6	#4	#6
• A. 38%	67%	• A. 34%	88%
• B. 43%	29%	• B. 47%	10%
• C. 14%	4%	• C. 17%	1%
• D. 5%	0%	• D. 5%	0%

Questions 5 and 7 were follow-up explanations clarifying answers given for Questions 4 and 6.

No significant difference on Question 4 for Groups A & B

The difference between Group A & B for Question 6 often was identified as the individuals of Group A indicated their seeing a Christian potter demonstration was myself – at the conference just completed or previously at a PCC chapel, Rejoice TV broadcast, or DVD.

Sample Comments – Question 8 Group A

“I always thought it was the potter’s mistake if the pot was not right, never thought a flaw in the clay” (OH)

“Is there a compiled list of these passages somewhere?” (KY)

“I just did not realize how many.” (KS)

“Have you made a study guide?” “Is there a written study available to use at home?” (two separate questionnaires KY)

“Makes me very interested in studying this topic.” (NV)

“Are you teaching anyone this ministry?” “Are you teaching this to others?” (NV; MI)

Sample comments from Group A reinforce and illustrate this researcher’s observations and concerns.

Sample Comments – Question 8 Group B

“What is it? And what is its significance?” (CO)

“What exactly is a Christian Potter demonstration?”
(IN; OH; MN)

“I feel I need to do a detailed study on this subject.” (IN)

“I am interested to learn more.” (KY)

“How does this apply to me?” “Can this be applied to my life in a personal way?” (two separate questionnaires CT)

“How does this relate to my life?” (MA)

The questionnaire sparked interest in the topic in individuals in churches that did not have a clay-potter conference.

Many sensed these passages were important ... applicable.

Summary

- **All 3 objectives met – assessment measured ...**
 - The significant ignorance or unawareness of the frequency and importance of the clay-potter imagery usage in the Bible.
 - The fact that the Bible’s clay-potter imagery has been ignored, superficially explained, or misrepresented.
 - Preaching/teaching the clay-potter passages in the church context will:
 - Raise the awareness of the frequency and importance
 - Lead to these passages being clarified and expanded
 - Verify how these passages spiritually impact lives

Every church where a conference was held spiritual decisions were made.

Formal Literature Assessment

- **4 erroneous explanations of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4**

- The wheel was going to fast.

“centrifugal forces at work” (Fretheim, 269)

The marring due to centrifugal force (Holladay, 516)

“Understanding the pottery craft makes it absolutely clear that the wheel’s speed producing the centrifugal forces is totally under the potter’s control. Every master potter is aware of the potential disaster in forming any vessel on a potter’s wheel rotating too fast.”

“God the ultimate Master Potter cannot be identified with the potter of Jeremiah 18 if the explanation for the marring of the vessel is the potter’s wheel going too fast.”

Formal Literature Assessment

- **4 erroneous explanations of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4**

- The clay was too wet.

The clay “began to sag under the weight” (Craigie, 244)

Interestingly, Huey states just the opposite – its inferior quality was not wet enough (Huey, 180)

“If the potter is unskilled and takes too long to fashion the vessel on the wheel and thus constantly adds water for a lubricant, the clay will become too wet and sag. A master potter forms a vessel in a matter of minutes not hours.”

“Therefore the master potter does not begin with clay too wet to shape, nor does he take too long to finalize the vessel because either mistake would weaken the clay and cause sagging.”

Formal Literature Assessment

- **4 erroneous explanations of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4**

- The potter did not have enough clay.

“He had taken too little, the potter suddenly changed his mind, crushed the growing jar ... began anew ... fashioned it into a totally different vessel.” (Freedman, 125)

The possible cause of the defect in size (Harrison, 108)

“Every master potter has in mind exactly the size and form of the vessel he intends to make before he begins. He never takes ‘too little’ clay and consequently has to ‘suddenly change his mind’. The master potter reflected in Jeremiah 18 is all-wise and all-knowing and does everything decently and in order. It is unthinkable to suggest the reason for the marring of the clay is due to the Potter’s lack of foresight and planning.”

Formal Literature Assessment

- **4 erroneous explanations of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4**

- **The potter’s inability**

Defect in design. (Harrison, 108)

A blemish in design and shaping (Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, 244)

“Some pots turn out fine the first time. Some do not, so the potter changes his tactics.” (Holladay, 514)

“One pot did not take shape. So the potter shaped the clay into a different kind of pot.” (Gosdeck, 119)

It has been implied /stated that the potter’s skill is lacking. This is not the case of the potter in Jeremiah 18.

Several O.T. scholars identify a high skill level for potters in Jeremiah’s day: Wright – “The craftsmanship is nowhere better seen in the making of pottery . . . It can be frankly stated that . . . The craftsmanship and forms are better than for similarly employed wares of today.” “Thus the old view that the Israelite had no artistic skill must certainly be revised in the field of ceramics.” No master potter uses trial and error or “I will make a simpler form” method of pottery making.

NOTE: Chapter 2, discusses Jeremiah 19 and the significance of “the earthen bottle” (*baqbuq*).

Formal Literature Assessment

- **4 erroneous explanations of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4 . . .**

- **All these place the cause for the “marring of the clay” on the Master Potter – God.**

Formal Literature Assessment

- **The correct explanation of the “marring of the clay” in Jeremiah 18:4**

- **Foreign material in clay – stone, chip of wood**

This is offered as the cause of the marring of the clay by some commentators, but the problem is that they suggest this as one of many possible causes. In reality it is the only cause – the problem is with the clay and not the master potter.

Thompson, *Jeremiah*, states, “the precise meaning of this verse [v. 4] is crucial to the interpretation.”

The specific cause of the vessel being marred in Jeremiah 18 is indeed crucial to the specific lesson of Jeremiah’s day and to the basic theological understanding of Who Jehovah is, the Master Potter.

Any suggested cause for the marring of the clay must not contradict orthodox biblical doctrine or impugn the character of God, the Master Potter. Only the unskilled, beginning potter would be guilty of the first four suggested causes.

Formal Literature Assessment

- The formal literature review reveals 3 facts:
 - Often Bible study resources/journal articles do not comment on pertinent aspects of the text.
 - When commented on, it is often superficial or erroneous – lacking technical understanding of pottery craft/skill or theological incompatibility.
 - There are occasional accurate and helpful comments of key details of the text – but, where does one find a full, accurate presentation of the text’s complete meaning and significance related to the clay-potter imagery in the Bible?

Popular Literature Assessment

- 3 sources of popular literature
 - Devotional books
 - Media material
 - Internet material

Popular Literature Assessment

- Evaluation of Devotional Books
 - Inaccurate connection to a true clay-potter metaphor
 - Personal experience replacing Bible intent
 - Erroneous analogies
 - Little or no direct teaching, explanation, or application of the clay-potter metaphor

“This writer applauds the desire and effort of many who have provided devotional material from the clay-potter imagery.”

“This writer is advocating another need must be met, namely accurate Bible exposition drawn directly from the text of Scripture and illustrated by the clay-potter metaphor.”

Keller, *The Master’s Hand*, 1 Cor. 9:27 “set on a shelf” – not a true clay-potter metaphor. The 1 Cor. 9 passage is disciplinary – fear of being set aside – not displayed for sale.

Diana Pavlac Gyer, *Clay in the Potter’s Hand*, “clay gets all over the potter” (Isa. 49:15-16)

Gyer – Chapter on “Restoring” erroneous explanations of Jeremiah 18

Lyn Gitchel, *Inside Clay Pots: In the Hands of the Master Potter*, the title raises expectations but only deals with clay/potter in the welcome/introduction.

Popular Literature Assessment

- **Evaluation of Media Material**
 - Very free explanations and applications
 - Incorrect statements – potter is the fault of marring
 - Lack of focus on the specific Bible texts

Lemme's DVD, *The Potter's Talk*, outside pressure – world; inside pressure – God. The only pressure forming the vessel comes from the master potter.

Pastor Greene DVD, *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*, treats 1 Cor. 3:10-15 as a clay-potter passage, but the metaphor is Master Builder not Master Potter.

Greene – “Finding completion in the kiln” is explained as the believer going to heaven.

Popular Literature Assessment

- **Evaluation of Internet Material**
 - Mixed metaphors
 - Inaccurate Bible explanation
 - Personal experience as the basis for explanation and application

Internet article “Potter and the Clay” Psalm 127:1 building a house (construction metaphor) and pruning (John 15, husbandman metaphor) are confused with clay-potter metaphor. Internet article, *The Potter and the Clay*, the potter is said to turn clay on a lathe (a woodworker's tool). Locklin (*Trust the Process*) “heart of the clay” has the spiritual significance of the heart of man (centering and opening up the clay, God is reaching into our heart). Internet article, *Lessons from a Potter*, the potter finally gives up and decides to throw the clay away and start all over with more clay.

Popular Literature Assessment

- **The popular literature review reveals 3 facts:**
 - Devotional material and studio potters often use mixed metaphors
 - Explanation and comments flow out of the potter's personal experience instead of biblical content/context.
 - Explanations and applications that contradict either Bible truth or the skill and thinking of a master potter.

Unrelated/mixed metaphors – building a house; pruning
Multiple subjective explanations

Proposed Solution

- Continue to present the clay-potter imagery truths in Bible conferences in churches
- Treatment of the Jeremiah 18 and 19 passage in this thesis (Chapter 5)
- Highlights of additional clay-potter passages in this thesis (Appendix A)
- Possible future materials
 - Book or booklets on the clay-potter passages; media presentations; Adult Bible Study material

Proposed Solution

- Continue to present the clay-potter imagery truths in Bible conferences in churches



Several Down at the Potter's House conferences are scheduled for the upcoming year.

Proposed Solution

- Treatment of the Jeremiah 18 and 19 passage in this thesis (chapter 5)
 - Jeremiah 18 – pliable in the hands of the Master Potter
 - Jeremiah 19 – hardened by sin – chastening of the Lord

Proposed Solution

- **Highlights of additional clay-potter passages in this thesis (Appendix A)**
 - Genesis – formed the dust of the ground
 - Isaiah – He is the potter; we are the clay
 - 2 Timothy – vessels of honor fit for the Master's use
 - 1 Peter – purified and strengthen by fiery trials

Proposed Solution

- **Possible future materials**
 - Book or booklets on the clay-potter passages
 - Media presentations
 - Adult Bible Study material

Theological and Practical Implications of this Thesis

- **Theologically**
 - Theology Proper – God as Master Potter is vindicated.
 - Bibliology – Scripture's integrity is recovered.
 - Anthropology – Balanced view of man is provided.
- **Practically**
 - The Holy Spirit is freed to use the clay-potter metaphor to its full potential to produce spiritual growth and fruit.

God is sensitive and skilled in His working with man.

The Bible's use of the clay-potter metaphor is understood and applied accurately.

Man is mere clay, but fashioned by God as a vessel of honor.

The Holy Spirit's does not have to work in spite of erroneous/superficial teaching, but can illumine divine truth and application through full correct Bible exposition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aalen, Sverre. “τιμ□.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 2:48–52. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Adeney, W. F. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Vol. 11 of *Pulpit Commentary*, edited by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1950.
- Alexander, Joseph Addison. *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.
- Amiran, Ruth. *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970.
- Baldwin, Teresa Cartwright. *I Am Clay, A Personal Journey with God, The Potter*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005.
- Ball, C. J. *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1890.
- Barnes, Albert. *James, Peter, John, and Jude*. Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament, edited by Robert Frew. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949.
- Barrett, Charles Kingsley. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Harper Commentaries. New York: Harper & Bros., 1957.
- Beit-Arieh, Irzhaq. “An Early Bronze Age III Settlement at Tel Ira in the Northern Negev.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 41, no. 1–3 (1991): 1–18.
- Beyreuther, Erich. “χρηστ□ς.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 2:105–107. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Bietenhard, Hans. “ξ□voς.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 1:686–690. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Binns, L. Elliott. *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*. London: Methuen, 1919.
- Blackwood, Andrew W., Jr. *Commentary on Jeremiah*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977.
- Blum, Edwin A. “1 Peter.” In *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 12:209–254. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *God and History, Romans 9-11*. Vol. 3 of *Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.
- Bradley, Michael. “Potter and The Clay—God Is the Potter, We Are the Clay.” <http://www.bible-knowledge.com/potter-and-the-clay> (accessed November 3, 2012).

- Branfman, Steve. *Raku, A Practical Approach*. Radnor, PA: Chilton Book, 1991.
- Bright, John. *Jeremiah*. Vol. 21 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William F. Albright and David N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1965.
- Brownson, William C. *Tried by Fire: The Message of 1 Peter*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1972.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, edited by R.V. G. Tasker. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1963.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down, A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25*. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Bullinger, E. W. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*. N.d. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968.
- Calvin, John. *A Commentary on Jeremiah, Vol. 2 of Geneva Series of Commentaries*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.
- Cohen, A. *The Psalms*. Soncino Books of the Bible. London: Soncino Press, 1992.
- Craigie, Peter C., Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr. *Jeremiah 1-25*. Vol. 26 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, edited by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Dallas: Word Books, 1991.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 2 of *International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, edited by J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979.
- Dauids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1990.
- Davis, John J. *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1975.
- . *The Psalms: Studies in the Hebrew Text*. Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1975.
- Delitzsch, F. *Isaiah*. Vol. 7 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, translated by James Martin. N.d. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1973.
- Dever, William G. “Ceramics, Ethnicity, and the Question of Israel’s Origins.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 58, no. 4 (1995): 200–213.

- Dolphin, Lambert. "Pots, Potters, and Clay." <http://www.ldolphin.org/clay.html> (accessed July 12, 2012).
- Dyer, Charles H. "Jeremiah." In *Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 1123–1206. Wheaton, IL: Victory Books, 1985.
- Earle, Ralph. "1, 2 Timothy." In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 11:341–418. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.
- Ellis-Lopez, Susan. "Analytical Techniques in Near Eastern Archaeology: Ethnography and Pottery Study." *Biblical Archaeologist* 59, no 3 (September 1996): 183.
- The Elna M. Smith Foundation. *The Parables of the Potter*. DVD. Eureka Springs, AR: Clarks Video Group, 1994, transferred to DVD 2004.
- Erdman, Charles R. *The Book of Isaiah*. Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1944.
- . *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966.
- Exell, Joseph S. "Jeremiah 1." In *Biblical Illustrator*, 9:1–462. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.
- Fausset, A. R. *Isaiah*. Vol. 3 of *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical*, edited by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 1869. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1945.
- Feinberg, Charles. "Jeremiah." In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited Frank E. Gaebelin, 6:355–691. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Finkelstein, I. *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988.
- Finkelstein, I., and N. Na'aman. *From Nomadism to Monarch: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994.
- Franken, H. J. "Analysis of Methods of Potmaking in Archaeology." *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (April–July 1971): 227–255.
- Freedman, H. *Jeremiah*. Soncino Books of the Bible, edited by A. Cohen. London: Soncino Press, 1992.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *Jeremiah*. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002.
- Gill, John. *An Exposition of the Book of the Prophets of the Old Testament*. Vol. 1. 1810. Reprint, Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979.

- Gitchel, Lyn. *Inside Clay Pots: In the Hands of the Master Potter*. N.p., 1995.
- Glyer, Diana Pavlac. *Clay in the Potter's Hands*. N.p.: Lindale & Associates, 2011.
- Godet, Frederic L. *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977.
- Gonen, Rivka. *Pottery in Ancient Times*. Edited by Michael Avi-Yonah. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 1974.
- Gosdeck, David M. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. People's Bible Commentary Series. St. Louis: Concordia, 1995.
- Greene, Joseph R. *Like Clay in the Potter's Hand*. DVD. 2006.
- Grogan, G. W. "Isaiah." In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 6:3–354. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Gromacki, Robert G. *Stand Firm in the Faith, An Exposition of II Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, edited by Leon Morris. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Guest, John. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. The Communicator's Commentary, edited Lloyd J. Ogilvie. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988.
- Habel, Norman C. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 1968.
- Harris, Murray J. *2 Corinthians*. In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 10:299–406. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Harrison, Everett F. *Romans*. In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 10:1–171. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Harrison, R. K. *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- Hawkins, Thomas R. *The Potter and the Clay, Meditations on Spiritual Growth*. Nashville: Upper Room, 1986.
- Henderson, E. *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and That of the Lamentations*. Boston: W. H. Halliday, 1868.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond. *1 Peter*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1984.
- . *Second Timothy*. Everyman's Bible Commentary. Chicago: Moody, 1958.

- Hodder, I. *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986.
- Hodge, Charles. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Rev. ed. 1886. Reproduction reprint,
- Hoerth, Alfred. J. *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.
- Holladay, William L. *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Hoyt, Herman. *The First Christian Theology, Studies in Romans*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977.
- Huey, F. B., Jr. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Vol. 16 of *The New American Commentary*, edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Jamieson, H. "Potter." In *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney, 824-829. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Jellie, W. Harvey. *Jeremiah*. Vol. 17 of *Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Jenning, F. C. *Studies in Isaiah*. New York: Loizeaux, 1950.
- Jerome. "The Parable of the Potter." In *Jeremiah, Lamentations of Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, edited by Dean O. Wenhe, 12:145–146. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009.
- Jobes, Karen H. *1 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Johnson, Alan F. "Revelation." In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, 12:399–603. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Johnston, Robert H. "The Biblical Potter." *Biblical Archaeologist* 37, no. 4 (December 1974): 86–106.
- . "Potter, Pottery." In *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3:913-921. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Keach, Benjamin. *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1972.
- Keil, C. F. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Vol. 8 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, and translated by David Patrick and James Kennedy. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1973.

- Kelley, William. *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*. London: Hammond, 1896. Reprint, n.p. 1947.
- Keller, Phillip. *In the Master's Hands*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1987.
- . *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970.
- . *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.
- Kelso, James L. *The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament*. New Haven, CT: American Society of Oriental Research, 1948.
- Kent, Homer A., Jr. *A Heart Opened Wide, Studies in II Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1982.
- . *The Pastoral Epistles, Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*. N.d. Reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, 1982.
- King, Philip J. *Jeremiah, An Archaeological Companion*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993.
- Kistemaker, Simon J. *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987.
- Laetsch, Theo. *Jeremiah*. Bible Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 1952.
- Lawton, Wendy. "Lessons from Clay." *Discipleship Journal* 115 (January/February 2000): 62–65.
- Lazovich, Pat. *In the Potter's Hands*. DVD. Costa Mesa, CA: Calvary Chapel, n.d.
- Leighton, Robert. *Commentary on First Peter*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1972.
- Lemme. *The Potter's Talk*. VHS. Denton, TX: 1994.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961.
- . *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966.
- "Lessons from the Potter's House." The Sermon Notebook. http://222.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Her%2917_1-6.htm (accessed December 2, 2012).
- Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of Genesis*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.

- . *Exposition of Isaiah*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1971.
- . *Exposition of the Psalms*. N.d. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1969.
- Link, Hans-Georg. “α□σχ□νη.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 3:561–564. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Link, Hans-Georg, and Johannes Schattermann. “καθαρ□ς.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 2:102–108. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Locklin, Debbie. *Trust the Process: He is the Potter*. Ragley, LA: Potter’s House School, 2006. <http://www.thepottershouseschool.com/index.htm> (accessed November 3, 2012).
- Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Parables of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963.
- . *All the Trades and Occupations of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.
- Lunbom, Jack. R. *Jeremiah 1–20*. Vol. 21a of *Anchor Bible*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- Luther, Martin. *Commentary on Peter and Jude*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990.
- MacRae, Allen A. *The Gospel of Isaiah*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1977.
- Magrill, Pamela, and Andrew Middleton. “Did the Potter’s Wheel Go out of Use in Late Bronze Age Palestine?” *Antiquity* 75, no. 287 (March 2001): 137–144.
- Mandaville, Erik. “An Arabian Cave Potter.” *Ceramics Monthly*, May, 1988.
- Markon, Isaak Dov Ber, and Shimon Gibson. “Pottery.” In *Encyclopedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum, 16:421–426. New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007.
- Martin, John A. “Isaiah.” In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 1029–1121. Wheaton, IL: Victory Books, 1985.
- Mazar, Amihai. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000-586 B.C.E.* New York: Doubleday, 1990.
- McClain, Alva J. *Romans, The Gospel of God’s Grace*. Compiled and edited by Herman Hoyt. Chicago: Moody Press, 1973.
- McGovern, P. E. *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Transjordan, The Baqcah Valley Project, 1977-1981*. Philadelphia: University Museum, 1986.

- McKane, William. *Jeremiah 1–25. Vol. 1 of International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, edited by J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986.
- McRay, John R. “Pottery.” In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, 4:1739–1741. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988.
- Meyer, F. B. *Jeremiah: Priest and Prophet*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1894.
- . *Tried by Fire: Exposition of First Peter*. Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1977.
- Millard, A. R. “Potter, Pottery.” *The New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas, 1012–1016. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1962.
- Mission Bible Class. “Jeremiah Learns Lessons from a Potter.” <http://missionbibleclass.org/old-testament-stories/old-testament-part-2> (accessed December 1, 2012).
- Morris, Henry M. *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976.
- Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Murray, John. *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary on the New Testament, edited by F. F. Bruce. 1959. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1968.
- Neagelsbach, C. W. Edward. *Isaiah*. Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. 1877. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.
- . *Jeremiah*. Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1873.
- Nelson, Glenn C. *Ceramics, A Potter’s Handbook*. 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.
- Newell, William R. *Romans Verse by Verse*. New York: Arno C. Gaebelein, 1938.
- Nicol, B. J. *God’s Pottery, Knowing the Potter and the Clay*. N.p.: Xulon Press, 2006.
- Nisbet, Alexander. *1 and 2 Peter*. Geneva Series Commentary. Reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982.
- Orelli, C. Von. *The Prophecies of Isaiah*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1889.
- . *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*. 1889. Reprint, Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1977.

- Patch, James A. "Potter, Pottery." In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by James Orr, 4:2423–2426. 1956. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1976.
- Patten, Mildred L. *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles: Pyrczak, 1998.
- Peake, A. S. *Jeremiah*. Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1910.
- Perowne, J. J. Stewart. *The Book of Psalms*. Vol 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966.
- Plumptre, E. H. "Jeremiah." In *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, edited by Charles John Ellicott, 5:1–177. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954.
- Porret, Evelyne. "Oasis." *Ceramics Monthly*, June/July/August, 1984.
- "The Potter and the Clay . . . Jeremiah 18:1–6." <http://www.chiptape.com/chiptape/Bible/Dad/Potter.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2012).
- Pratico, Gary D. and Miles V. Van Pelt. *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Pritchard, James, ed. *The Ancient Near East, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Vol. 1. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958.
- Rea, John. "Pottery." In *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, edited by Merrill Tenney, 674–678. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963.
- Rhodes, Daniel. *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*. Iola, WI: Krause Publishing, 2000.
- Ronsheim, Marian G. Riebe, "Folk Pottery in Israel." *Ceramics Monthly*, January, 1977.
- Ryken, Philip Graham. *Courage to Stand: Jeremiah's Battle Plan for Pagan Times*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Sailhamer, John H. "Genesis." In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, 2:3–284. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- Sanday, William and Arthur C. Headlam. *The Epistle to the Romans*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895.
- Schippers, Reinier. "□ρτιος." In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, 3:349–351. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Slotki, Israel Wolf. *Isaiah*. London: Soncino Press, 1949.
- Stager, L. E. "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260 (1985): 1–35.

- Stevenson, Peter A. *Isaiah*. Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2003.
- . *Psalms*. Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2007.
- Stibbs, Alan M. *The First Epistle General of Peter*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1959.
- Streane, A. W. *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, edited by J. J. S. Perowne. Cambridge: University Press, 1899.
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 1. S.v. “צִר” by Thomas E. McComiskey.
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. S.v. “צִר” by Herman J. Austel.
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. S.v. “יִשָּׁר” by Donald J. Wiseman.
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. S.v. “עֶפֶר” by Ronald B. Allen.
- Thompson, J. A. *The Book of Jeremiah*. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1980.
- Troy, Jack. “Gleanings: A Potter in China.” *Ceramics Monthly*, November, 1996.
- Vine, W. E. *Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946.
- . *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- Weingreen, J. *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.
- Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969.
- White, K. Owen. *The Book of Jeremiah*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961.
- Wilson, William. *New Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987.
- Witmer, John A. “Romans.” In *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 435–503. Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983.
- Wood, Bryant G. “Before They Were Sherds: Pottery in the Bible.” *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 1, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 27–31.
- . “The Master Potter.” *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 28–33.

———. *The Sociology of Pottery in Ancient Palestine*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990.

Wright, G. Ernest. "Israelite Daily Life." *Biblical Archaeologist* 18, no. 3 (1955): 50–79.

Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah*. Vol. 1–3. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1965.

VITA

Karl A. Stelzer

PERSONAL

Born: May 2, 1949

Married: June 5, 1971

Children: David Hans, born July 30, 1972

Suzannah Lynn, born June 5, 1975

Daniel James, born April 18, 1977

John William, born August 10, 1988

EDUCATIONAL

BA, Bluffton College, 1971

M.Div., Grace Theological Seminary, 1977

Harold H. Etling Award in Christian Education, 1977

Th.M., Grace Theological Seminary, 1982

Ph.D., Pensacola Theological Seminary, 2001

MINISTERIAL

Ordination, March 7, 1978, Fellowship Baptist Church, Warsaw, IN

PROFESSIONAL

Assistant Pastor, Fellowship Baptist Church, Warsaw, IN, 1975-1981

Senior Pastor, Bible Baptist Church, Newark, OH, 1982-1990

Teacher, Licking County Christian Academy, Heath, OH, 1990-1997

Who's Who Among America's Teachers, 1996

Professor, Pensacola Christian College, Pensacola, FL, 1997-present

Teaching Excellence Award, Pensacola Christian College, 2000

Dean of Bible Division, Pensacola Christian College, Pensacola, FL, 2002-2006

Professor, Pensacola Theological Seminary, Pensacola, FL, 1998-present

IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER

March 30, 2012

Dr. Karl Stelzer

IRB Exemption 1291.033012: Clay-Potter Imagery in the Bible: Theological and Practical Implications for Daily Christian Life

Dear Dr. Stelzer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), **survey procedures**, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,



Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

IRB Chair, Associate Professor

Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054