

Aim of lesson

To show that God cares about what we become and can mould us into the sort of people he wants us to be if we respond to him.

Bible background

Jeremiah 18:1-12; 19; 20:1-2; 9:23-24.

Outline of lesson

The setting

This lesson begins a series of four on a new prophet. It would be helpful to look at Jeremiah 1:1-3 and find the picture which represents the prophet Jeremiah on the time chart. The name of the prophet can be written on his tunic and his relationship in time, to known characters and events can be noted. For example, Isaiah prophesied a number of years before; it is possible that Jeremiah's grandfather or great grandfather may have met Isaiah. Certainly some of the oldest people in Jerusalem when Jeremiah was growing up would have remembered Isaiah – an old man when they were young.

The first visit to the potter

Use the first three pictures in the workbook to clarify the narrative of Jeremiah 18:1-12. After reading the passage the class can note underneath each picture what is happening and what it represents. Bring out the lesson of God as a redeemer, one who can rescue his people even when they have gone wrong, just as the potter re-formed the first pot into a good pot.

The second visit

Read Jeremiah 19 with the class. The difference between the pot in chapter 19 and that already considered in chapter 18 is that now the pot has been fired, the clay is hard and will not be re-shaped. This chapter shows that the people of Judah refuse to be re-formed by God's teaching. They will not change, just as the kiln-hardened clay pot resists all re-shaping. When a pot is seriously flawed at this stage, the only solution is to smash it. This is what Jeremiah does in front of all the people outside the city gate. Ask the class again to write under each picture in the workbook the events and their meaning.

Crossword

To summarise the lesson from these two chapters, the class can fill in the crossword in the workbook. Note that clues 3, 4 and 6 are from the quotation from Jeremiah 9 printed in the workbook at the start of this lesson. The answers are as follows: (1) Jerusalem; (2) Potter; (3) Righteousness; (4) Kindness; (5) Smashed; (6) Justice; (7) Clay; (8) Hands.

Smashed or re-shaped

Ask the class to list the reasons why God says he will smash the nation, Jeremiah 19:4, 5, 13, 15 can be referred to. This should be contrasted with the four things that God values from Jeremiah 9:23-24. Note in Jeremiah 20:1-2 the reaction to Jeremiah's preaching which shows a hardened attitude by one of the chief priests.

Digging deeper

More about clay

This section considers how we are moulded by God, and although it sometimes seems hard we have to accept God's will.

Relevance to our lives

Suggest to the class that they use the contrast from the previous section to start thinking about their own lives. Ask them what God is looking for that will please him. Is it the same as Jeremiah 9:23-24? What attitudes will result in us being classed as pots fit only for smashing? Encourage them to see that this is not a single wrong act. The potter could re-shape the first flawed pot. A persistent refusal to listen to God's word and a determination to choose our own selfish way, will make us too hardened to be changed by him.

Prayer

'Help me to listen to your word and to be changed by what you teach me.'

Jeremiah spent a night in the stocks after being beaten for giving this message. What might he have prayed during the uncomfortable night? If he could see into the future to the days of your class, what might he have prayed for them?

Other suggestions for activities

The newspaper of the time of Jeremiah could be continued.

It would be very useful to have some clay and make pots to illustrate the message of Jeremiah. Some flawed results could even be smashed to remind the class of the warning in Jeremiah's teaching.

The class could follow the theme of clay jars through to the New Testament. In Acts 9:15 (AV) Paul was certainly moulded. 2 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:20; Revelation 2:27.