

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2015: *Jeremiah*
Lesson 6 “Symbolic Acts”

Read for this week’s study

Genesis 4:3–7; Numbers 21:1–9; Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:18–21; Jeremiah 19; Hebrews 5:14; Jeremiah 13:1–11.

Memory Text

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Romans 9:21).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Truth in Symbols
- III. The Potter’s Clay
- IV. The Degeneration of a Nation
- V. Smashing the Jar
- VI. The Linen Belt
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. Before we address the matter of symbolic acts in the ministry of Bible prophets, let us notice that the memory verse is from Romans, though we are studying the book of Jeremiah. Is it fair to use Matthew (1:23) to interpret Isaiah (7:14) or Paul (Romans 9:19-23) to interpret Jeremiah (18:1-10)? Is it the best approach towards understanding a biblical author?
2. Of course, a later inspired author can bring new insights into what God is doing today and how that is connected with the preceding Bible story, but does that change the meaning of the original story or event? What about us as uninspired interpreters? As Adventists, we refuse to allow Martin Luther or John Calvin to be the final interpreters of Paul. Does the same principle apply to Ellen White as an inspired interpreter? Why is it important to “heed to prophetic voice” in our time (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 2 Peter 1:19-21), yet to also be meticulous in our attempt to understand the Bible authors in their original setting and meaning? Or are we here just to disseminate the ideas of the latest inspired author?

3. “Every student of the Bible knows that it is filled with symbols, things that represent concepts and ideas other than themselves. (...) The book of Jeremiah itself is rich with symbolism and imagery. This week we’re going to take a look at a few of these symbols, what they were, what they meant, and what lessons we should take away from them for ourselves.” (Sabbath afternoon) What is different between types (found mostly in historical books of the Bible), symbols (found mostly in apocalyptic literature of the Bible) and symbolic acts (found mostly in prophetic books)?
4. “Read Genesis 4:3–7. What do their two different sacrifices symbolize? Very early in the Bible we can see the difference between the attempt to work one’s way to heaven (in the offering of Cain) and the realization that salvation is by grace alone, made available to us only through the merits of a crucified Savior (the offering of Abel).” (Sunday’s lesson) How do we know the act is supposed to symbolize something? Where in the Genesis text do we learn that these two sacrifices are supposed to represent two different approaches to salvation? How does the later inspired author help (or not help) here? (See Hebrews 11:4 – “By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.” Hebrews 12:24 – “...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”)
5. The second story from outside of Jeremiah is Num 21:4-9. Here at least we have a clear use of symbolic meaning by a later inspired author (John 3:14; 12:32). If uninspired interpreters like us see symbolism in something, does it make a legitimate interpretation (e.g. assuming the red cord that Rahab put at her window represents the blood of Jesus that saves us...)?
6. “All through the Old Testament, the earthly sanctuary service served as the most detailed symbolic representation of the plan of salvation. How much the Israelites understood about the meaning of all the rituals has been an open question for millennia though no doubt many did grasp the most important of all truths taught there: substitutionary atonement, the idea that in order for their sins to be forgiven a substitute had to die in their stead (see 1 Corinthians 5:7).” (Sunday’s lesson) Do you agree that the substitutionary atonement is the most important [sanctuary/Bible] truth?
7. If this image was intended to be grasped by any Israelite, why had none made the connection until well into the Christian era? There is no clear evidence in the Old Testament that the people saw the sacrificial lamb as referring to a coming deliverer. Only after the resurrection did the combination of Isaiah 53 and the Passover imagery come together to portray Jesus as the suffering one who died for our sins. In the quoted text of 1 Corinthians 5:7 Jesus is referred to as the Passover lamb (the only New Testament passage to do so): “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” But

even here Paul is not discussing the Passover interpretation; he simply is making an application with reference to a very difficult situation in the Corinth church.

8. The first symbolic act discussed in the lesson is the situation in a potter's house (18:1-10). What is the lesson that Judah was supposed to learn?
9. "We can rest assured that, despite the reality of human free will and free choices, and the often calamitous results of abusing that free will, in the end, we can hope in the absolute sovereignty of our loving and self-sacrificing God, whose love is revealed on the cross." (Monday's lesson) Do we get the idea of "absolute sovereignty" from reading Jeremiah, or by reading Calvin back into Jeremiah?
10. What are the acted parables of the smashed jar (19:1-15) and the spoiled linen belt (13:10-11) supposed to convey to Jeremiah's contemporaries? How can God get our attention today? What can we do to communicate His message to this world in a more captivating way?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: It's part of our problem, then, that we are taking models from our legal system here and trying to apply them to God.

Graham: That's a very good point, very much so.

Lou: The "substitutionary," that comes in, say more about that. The "vicarious."

Graham: Ah. He died in our stead. He died as the substitution. In a way, it's very true. I mean, either He dies or we die. However that's where the comparison ends, because if God has let you and me and all other sinners die, all it would have done is prove the truthfulness of His warning, "If you sin, you will die." And God could say to the universe, "Was I right? I said sinners would die, and look, they're dead."

But the universe would not have had answers to questions two and three that I just mentioned. When Jesus died, there was no doubt in the minds of the universe that God was not killing His Son. They were clear about that. And the death of Christ answers all those three questions. So it's not either us or Him. His death was infinitely more significant than ours. But had He not died, then what else could God do but leave us to reap the consequences and we all would have died. So in a sense, yes. He died in our stead, but beyond that there's no comparison.

Lou: But not as a payoff. It's not one or the other.

Graham: It's not His death is equal to all of ours. His death is infinitely more significant than the death of every sinful man or angel who has ever lived. The death of angels and men would not have answered the questions.

Lou: What you're saying then, is that just a simple satisfaction idea doesn't encompass what's involved at all, does it?

Graham: Oh, it makes it much too small. I think it puts God in a very bad light, and it doesn't answer the questions of the great controversy.

Many folk who prefer those understandings of the plan of salvation do not understand there has been a universe-wide great controversy over the character and government of God. And do you remember at our first meeting, I brought along the evidence that even Luther, hero of the Christian world that he is, could not conceive of these larger issues because he couldn't include the book of Revelation—let alone Hebrews, James and Jude. And this has been the pattern through the years. Not many have seen the sixty-sixth book picture of a universe-wide controversy over the character and government of God. And so they have seen the death of Christ as primarily a plan just to save you and me, for which we are very grateful. It's just that the larger view makes the cross much more significant. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #8 with Lou Venden, "The Most Costly And Convincing Evidence" recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>*

Lou: Thinking about our topic as we come to this number twenty, "At Peace with Our Heavenly Father," I believe I hear you emphasizing that peace comes through knowing the truth and knowing that Satan's charges are false. Those charges have been summarized in five words that you've used again and again throughout this series: arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, severe. Those are Satan's charges. Just to review, I'd like to try to phrase a question that may pull all of our thinking in together for just a bit.

Arbitrary. When we say that God is sovereign, "The sovereignty of God," that has a great ring to it, and I think has a great history of understanding. Didn't God make the world, create it? Can't He run it any way He wants to?

Graham: That reminds us of our earlier discussion, when Romans 9 came up for consideration—the potter and the clay.

Lou: Yes.

Graham: Absolutely, God is sovereign. In the great controversy, larger view, I think He sounds more sovereign than ever. He created this universe precisely as He wished it to be, and He runs it precisely as He wishes to run it and He always will.

But the next question is how *does* He run it? Arbitrary? He values nothing higher than our freedom. If we could say He's arbitrary about anything, He's arbitrary about freedom. He would

rather give up everything than give up freedom. That's how arbitrary He is on that. I'm glad He's arbitrary about freedom.

Lou: So you're comfortable with the word "sovereign," but then you want us to understand that sovereign means we're free.

Graham: That's right.

Lou: Rather than that God is arbitrary.

Graham: This is how He exercises His sovereignty. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #20 with Lou Venden, "At Peace With Our Heavenly Father" recorded June, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/20MMCAG>*

In Romans 1-8, Paul has been saying to his audience (which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles,) "I have great good news for you. God will save all who trust Him—whether you are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. He'll save everybody who trusts Him."

And as Paul was developing chapters 1-8, he could sense that certain members of His audience (descended from Abraham) were not taking this too kindly, because they thought that they had a *special relationship* with God. You know, God almost had made a deal with their ancestor. And that's why they were so concerned with their genealogy and other matters. And when Paul got to the end of chapter 8, he sensed that some in his audience were quite offended. So he turned to them and said, "I sense that some of you don't like what I've said, that God is the kind of God that would save all who trust Him. I want to know, (you people who object to this) are you suggesting you would run the universe better than God? Are you saying God cannot save all who trust Him? Let me tell you something: God is going to run this universe precisely as He wishes. Just as the potter takes a lump of clay, and makes of the same clay a vessel for honor, and a vessel for dishonor, so God has the right—if He will exercise it—to run His universe any way He likes!"

Now some people will take that out of context and say, "God takes the material we are all made of and makes some to be saved and some to be lost. So, what's the use of trying to know Him at all? Our destiny has already been determined."

No, what Paul is saying there is that God has just as much authority as the potter—more so. He created this universe. He's going to run it precisely as He wishes. And He won't ever change. You can count on it. You say that sounds arbitrary? "No, I've been telling you in chapters 1-8 how He runs the universe. So infinitely gracious that He values nothing higher than our freedom, and will save all who trust Him, but doesn't expect us to trust Him as a stranger, and so at infinite cost He has revealed the truth about Himself. And that's what you don't like, isn't

it, audience.” So he really is saying, “You impudent, irreverent people. How dare you tell God how to run His universe!”

How *does* He run the universe? Please read Romans 1-8. Infinitely graciously. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #1 “The Conflict In God’s Family” recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/1MMCAG>

In other words, they were objecting to God saying, “The way I run my universe, all I ask of angels and men is trust, even of you sinners. I’ll not only forgive you, but I’ll heal all the damage done, and completely restore you, all of you!” They objected. Now I understand Paul to be saying to the people, “Who are you to tell God how to run His universe? Who are you to say whom God can save? What a nerve!”

He doesn’t explain here how God runs things. That’s Romans 1 through 8. So one has to read the setting very carefully. He’s not saying God gives us no choice in the matter. He’s saying, “I have never seen such impudence in my life; you telling God He can’t save everybody who trusts Him. God is going to run His universe as He wishes! P.S. Not as a tyrant does, but in support of freedom. He will save all who trust Him and trust each other.”

It was their objection to Romans 1 through 8 that led to Romans 9, so one has to put Romans very carefully in context. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 - Exodus, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/3MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

If God is going to run the universe the way He wants to run it, consistent with His character; why should a God of power, sovereign of the universe, why should He allow a conflict such as we are reading about here in Revelation the twelfth chapter; this picture of war in Heaven. Why should He allow that even to develop, to happen?

Graham: That fits very well with the last point, doesn’t it? See, if He has that much authority and power, how could a war even take place? And this is why those who stress the sovereignty of God (and surely it is right that we should stress that) have great difficulty allowing for a war. And that’s why many of the reformers really couldn’t use that sixty-sixth book. Luther says, “It was fancied that there was a war”. He just couldn’t wrap his mind around the idea. But to me, it’s one of the most wonderful things about God, that though He had the infinite power

necessary to nip that war in the bud, to stop it before it ever started, He did not do so. There must be something of more value than our subservience and our submission to His power, because He allowed that thing to grow and to grow. Now, by our assessment of good administration, God was weak. It was bad management. I mean, how long would we tolerate a leader—how long would the pastor last in our church, if there was such chaos in the membership? The committee would meet!

Lou: The person would move on, wouldn't he!

Graham: Yes. Are we going to move our God on, and suggest it was weakness on His part? We know He has infinite power. But in His infinite power, He allowed this war to develop. He allowed the questions to arise. Now that says that there is something of even greater importance than even our mere submission to His infinite power. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #1 with Lou Venden, "The Conflict In God's Family" recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/1MMCAG>*

How God must wish that trust and friendship could be restored in that part of the world where so many of the people are the children of his old friend Abraham. Then why doesn't the omnipotent One step in and impose his sovereign will? Didn't Jesus himself teach that "with God all things are possible"? (See Matthew 19:26) Would anyone dare suggest that there is anything God cannot do? But if by the exercise of might and power he could turn everyone in the Middle East—not to mention the rest of the world—into loving, trusting friends, then who is to blame for continuing suspicion and hostility?

God answered these questions himself. And the rest of the Bible is a demonstration of the truthfulness and significance of his explanation. " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6, NIV)

This message was passed on by the prophet Zechariah to Zerubbabel, the leader of the Israelites who had recently returned to Judah from Babylonian exile. After 70 years of discipline in captivity, the people were being offered yet another chance to show themselves worthy descendants of their father Abraham, a chance to live together in such peace and harmony that Jerusalem would become known as "the City of Truth," "the City of Faithfulness." (Zechariah 8:3, NIV and REB)

It could be such a safe and friendly place that "once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." (Zechariah 8:4,5, NIV)

Reports of the honesty and kindness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would spread so far that “many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty . . . In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’ ” (Zechariah 8:22,23, NIV)

This is what God had always wanted for the descendants of his old friend Abraham—and not only for them, but for all who through the friendship and trustworthiness of Abraham’s children would come to know the truth about Abraham’s God.

But God’s message to Zerubbabel was that, much as he longed to help Israel become such people, it could not be accomplished by might and power, but only by the way the Spirit works. And while no one can oppose God’s *power*, as Nebuchadnezzar finally conceded, it is still possible for the weakest human to say no to the still small voice of love and truth.

By might and power God called into existence the whole vast universe. But even infinite power could not hold the loyalty of Lucifer, (See Revelation 12:7-9) his most brilliant angel, or convince many of the children of Adam and Eve to love and trust their Creator. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, 50-51. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter4.html>

Even in the final, awesome death of the wicked, God still reveals his respect for the freedom and individuality of his intelligent creatures. He has made it plain throughout Scripture that he is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). ““As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?”” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Like a physician, God stands ready to heal us; but he will not force us to be well. If we refuse his healing, God will respect our decision. If we insist on leaving, he will let us go. But the consequences will be terrible. And as we leave him for the last time, his cry over us will be the sad cry of Hosea, “How can I give you up! How can I let you go!” (see Hosea 11:8). {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 96. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-09>

Further Study with Ellen White

Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, a new principle of mental and spiritual power was to be brought to man, who, through association with divinity, was to become one with God. Christ, the redeemer and restorer, was to sanctify and purify man's mind, making it a power that would draw other minds to Himself. It is His purpose, by the elevating, sanctifying power of the truth, to give men nobility and dignity. He desires His children to reveal His character, to exert His influence, that other minds may be drawn into harmony with His mind. . . . {RC 17.4}

God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. {FLB 129.2}

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, a God of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. By the world's Redeemer the thick darkness with which Satan had enshrouded the throne of the Deity was swept away, and the Father was again manifest to men as the Light of life. {RH, February 15, 1912 par. 4}

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health. It is the Heaven-ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and characters (Letter 406, 1906). {6BC 1074.2}

As you see the enormity of sin, as you see yourself as you really are, do not give up to despair. It was sinners that Christ came to save. We have not to reconcile God to us, but—O wondrous love!—God in Christ is "reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. He is wooing by His tender love the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of his children, as is God with those He seeks to save. No one could plead more tenderly with the transgressor. No human lips ever poured out more tender entreaties to the wanderer than does He. All His promises, His warnings, are but the breathing of unutterable love. {SC 35.3}

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, "I have declared unto them Thy name, "—"merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, "—"that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," [1 Peter 1:12] and it will be their study throughout endless ages. {DA 19.2}

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, "It is finished," had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. {DA 758.2}

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion. {DA 758.3}

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Thus the world's Redeemer illustrates the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. The living agent, by an act of faith of his own, places himself in the hands of the Lord for Him to work in him His good pleasure in His time. There must be a continual exercise of faith to be in Christ and keep in Christ, abiding by faith in Him. {TMK 55.2}

This is a training process, a constant discipline of the mind and heart, that Christ shall work His great work in human hearts. Self, the old natural self, dies, and Christ's will is our will, His way is our way, and the human agent becomes, with heart, mind, and intellect, an instrument in the hands of God to work no more wickedness but the righteousness of Christ. . . . {TMK 55.3}

The Christian life is one of daily surrender, submission, and continual overcoming, gaining fresh victories every day. This is the growing up into Christ, fashioning the life into the divine Model. {TMK 55.4}