

# Jeremiah Buys a Field

## Jeremiah's Ninth Symbolic Action

### 32: 1-15

**DIG:** At the end of Chapter 26, Jeremiah was last seen under arrest for preaching in the Temple. As this chapter opens in 587 BC, what is happening to the City and Yirmeyahu? Why? How then do you account for the intrusion and seeming irrelevance of Jeremiah's cousin and God's confirming word? At this time is the real estate market a buyer's market, or a seller's market? Why does Jeremiah have the right and duty to buy it (Leviticus 25:23-25; Ruth 4:1-4)? Why does he purchase the field? What proof did he have that it was the right thing to do? How do the parts played by Hanam'el, the witnesses and Baruch serve the overall point of this passage?

**REFLECT:** Of what comfort to you are long-range assurances of prosperity, when your present financial outlook is precarious (at best) or bankrupt (at worst)? What lessons of hope have you learned that could only have been taught to you through adversity, doom and gloom? The LORD gave Yirmeyahu advance confirmation of His will regarding Jeremiah's purchase of the field from his nephew. Have you ever challenged God about the way things have turned out in your life? How did God answer? What kind of an answer did you expect? What role does God have in your decision making process?

Zedekiah revolted in 587 BC in the ninth year of his reign and the fall of Jerusalem came in his eleventh year, so these events take place in the tenth year.

The one main point to Jeremiah's ninth symbolic action  
(what might be called a parable in action)  
is that just as God's promise that Jerusalem and Judah would be destroyed,  
so will the eventual restoration of Jerusalem and Judah come true as well.

This chapter records a transaction revealing Jeremiah's faith in the future of the people. Jerusalem was under siege; the prophet had foretold its downfall and the subsequent exile of the nation. At such a time of confusion and uncertainty, Yirmeyahu, at the bidding of ADONAI, purchases an estate in Anathoth from his kinsman, giving the deed of purchase to Baruch with the firm conviction that the nation would again return to her homeland. This incident alone is sufficient to free Jeremiah from the charge of pessimism. He was a realist and had not doubt about the imminent collapse of Judah, but simultaneously his trust in God's word made him confident of her renewal.

**The occasion:** In the dark days of impending disaster, Yirmeyahu received a divine command and promise that must have seemed like mockery to him. This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem. Certainly Yirmeyahu's words could only lower the morale of the troops who were mounting the defense of the City. Accordingly, Jeremiah was confined to King Hezekiah's courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah (32:1-2). There was no regular prison system in those days, but there was always a way to keep troublemakers in "protective custody."

Zedekiah rebelled because he thought he could count on the Egyptian army. And during the siege, because of their treaty with Egypt, Pharaoh moved toward Yerushalayim to try to help the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar reacted to the Egyptian aggression by temporarily lifting the siege of Jerusalem and going out to meet Pharaoh's army. Now during that time when the siege was lifted, Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned Jeremiah there (and he would actually stay imprisoned until after the fall of the City), saying: Why do you prophesy as you do (32:3a)? Why do you continue to insist that Tziyon will fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians?

These verses are a parenthesis to account for Jeremiah's arrest. The prophet had announced: This is what ADONAI says, "I am about to give this City into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape the Babylonians but will certainly be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him with his own eyes. He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will remain until I deal with him. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed" (32:3b-5). So these verses only present a general background for the narrative to follow; the inquiry of the king does not in fact relate in any specific way to what follows. All we know (yet again) is a grave threat to crown and City. The king does not really ask for information, but makes a plea for rescue.

**The command:** Then suddenly the word of ADONAI came to Jeremiah. He forewarned His prophet, "Hanam'el son of Shalum your uncle is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it" (32:6-7). As the nearest kinsman (we must assume that Hanam'el was childless), Jeremiah was the go'el and could purchase the land and keep it in the family. While members of the tribe of Levi had no special tribal territory assigned to them, the priests were allotted thirteen cities (Joshua 21:19), and the Levites forty-eight cities (Joshua 21:41; Numbers 35:2-9). Hence they were allowed to own real estate that could be bought or sold only to a fellow Levite (Leviticus 25:32-34).

But the village of **Anathoth** was already under **Babylonian** control so this purchase would appear to be foolish. Who would buy a parcel of land that had already fallen into **enemy** hands? During the interval when **Nebuchadnezzar** had temporarily lifted the siege to contend with Pharaoh's army (see **Fm - Jeremiah in Prison**) **Hanam'el**, **Jeremiah's** cousin, came to **the prophet** and visited **him in prison**. Because of this apparent foolishness, **ADONAI** told **Yirmeyahu** in advance that **Hanam'el** would come so that **the prophet** would recognize **God's** hand in the request.<sup>333</sup>

Then, just as the **LORD** had said, my nephew **Hanam'el** (**Shalum** was **Jeremiah's** uncle, the brother of **Jeremiah's** father) came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said: **Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself (Jeremiah 32:8a).** This was a principle from **Leviticus 25:23-34** (see the commentary on **Ruth As - Bo'az is One of Our Closest Relatives, He is One of Our Kinsman Redeemers**). **Hanam'el** was in trouble financially and needed to sell his land to his creditors, and he was asking **Jeremiah** to keep it in the

**The purchase:** The fact that **Hanam'el** came to **Jeremiah** while he was imprisoned, confirmed to **the prophet** that it was indeed **the word of ADONAI**. So the transaction took place in prison. **Jeremiah** bought the field at **Anathoth** from his nephew **Hanam'el** and weighed out for him **seventeen shekels of silver (32:8b-9)**. **The price appears to be very low, but the field may have been small. It should also be kept in mind that the purchase price was determined by the number of years until the end of the Jubilee cycle when the estate would revert to the original owner. There is no suggestion in the text that the land was sold to Jeremiah at "panic value" due to the political situation.**

**Jeremiah** signed and sealed the dictated deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. He took the deed of purchase - the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy - and he gave this deed to **Baruch** son of **Neriah**, the son of **Mahseiah** (apparently detained with the prophet), in the presence of his nephew **Hanam'el** and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard (32:10-12). **There were two copies, the "sealed deed" and the "open copy" these were not two separate pieces of papyrus but a single sheet. The procedure was that the terms of the deed were written out on the top half of the sheet, and then the top half was rolled up, tied, and sealed. Then the terms were written a second time on the bottom half, and the bottom half, or the "open copy" was there for all to read. The sealed half at the top was a guarantee that the terms of the bottom half would not be tampered with; if the wording was ever challenged, the top half would be opened for verification.** This was done in accordance with the laws of their day. But at the time he did it, he was judged to be an impractical fool. Those watching him buy that field thought he was buying "a bridge to nowhere."

In their presence Jeremiah gave Baruch these instructions, "This is what the LORD of heaven's angelic armies, the God of Isra'el, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. (Those clay jars were like the ones found in Qumran with the Dead Sea Scrolls). The entire transaction concerning the field at Anathoth now comes into theological focus. For this is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in the Land" (32:13-15). From the mouth of God, we are given to discern the meaning of the economic-legal act. The triad of houses, fields and vineyards speaks of basic economic life. Those items will again be bought. The invasion of the Babylonians will indeed cause the economy to come to a halt. But this symbolic action showed that a remnant would be preserved and Jerusalem would eventually be restored.

Three months before his arrest, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that there "remains for us only the very narrow way, often extremely difficult to find (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Dw - The Narrow and Wide Gates](#)), of living every day as if it were our last, and yet living in faith and responsibility as though there were to be a great future. Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in the Land (32:15), proclaims Jeremiah, in paradoxical contrast to his prophecies of woe, just before the destruction of the Holy City. It is a sign from God and a pledge of a fresh start and a great future, just when all seems black. Thinking and acting for the sake of the coming generation, but being ready any day to go without fear or anxiety - that, in practice, is the spirit in which we are forced to live. It is not easy to be brave and keep that spirit alive, but it is essential."

While in prison, Bonhoeffer wrote to his fiancée Maria, "When Jeremiah said, in his people's hour of most severe need, that houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in the Land, it was a token of confidence in the future. That requires faith. And my God grant it to us daily."<sup>334</sup>