

1 **Vitality and Viability Study Committee Bible Study #2**
2 **Audacious Hope - Jeremiah 32: 1-15**
3 **Carol Scheppard**
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5 **I. Read Jeremiah 32: 1-15**

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7 **II. Consider some Commentary**

8 This story of Jeremiah buying the field at Anathoth has got to be one of the most
9 audacious/outlandish stories of hope in all scripture. Even at first glance, the situation is dire.
10 The text tells us that this is the tenth year of Zedekiah of Judah which was the eighteenth year
11 of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah king ten years earlier,
12 when he ordered King Jehoiachin, the legitimate Davidic heir, to accompany the first
13 deportation of Judeans taken into exile in Babylon. So, we join Jeremiah ten years into the exile
14 among those “left behind” in a severely depleted Jerusalem. Zedekiah has thrown Jeremiah into
15 prison for committing treason and insurrection – for prophesying that Zedekiah would himself
16 fall victim to Babylon. The prediction does not seem all that far-fetched, given that the
17 Babylonian army is at that very moment besieging the city, and is in fact camped on the very
18 piece of land available for Jeremiah’s purchase. Imprisoned by a puppet king in a besieged city,
19 Jeremiah is given the option to purchase a piece of land currently occupied by the Babylonians.
20 At full price. What a deal.

21 But the significance of this moment goes well beyond the immediate circumstances. Jeremiah’s
22 choice comes at a point in Judean history that constitutes the rock bottom of a narrative that
23 has been cascading for over 600 years. Way back when God’s people first entered this
24 Promised Land, both Moses and Joshua made clear that their success was contingent on
25 remembering who they are and why they are: They are the Chosen of God and the Servant of
26 God. Ten Commandments point to two basic principles: 1) Worship God Alone, 2) Take care of
27 each other.

28 After the successful reigns of David and Solomon, the United Kingdom divided. The bulk of the
29 tribes grouped together to form the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The smaller southern
30 Kingdom of Judah centered itself on David’s city of Jerusalem and worship in the temple there.
31 The unfolding story of the Divided Kingdom is basically the story of how the people forgot their
32 core identity, chose and chased after other gods, and lost their way.

33 The more powerful Israel went first. They trusted in their wealth and prosperity seeing it as a
34 sign of God’s favor. They worshiped not God, but their own accomplishments. They not only
35 neglected the poor and the needy, but heaped abuse upon them. As prophesied, they fell hard,
36 defeated by the powerful Assyrian army and scattered to the four winds.

37 Tiny Judah surprisingly learned no lessons from the destruction of Israel, and they charted their
38 own course for destruction. Fearing the principalities and powers now breathing down their
39 own neck, Judah sought military alliance with Egypt, trying to pit a super power against another

1 super power to save themselves. And they took confidence in their possession of the Temple in
2 Jerusalem and the proper worship they conducted there. Obviously Israel had taken the wrong
3 position on proper worship and that is why they went under. Jeremiah's clear warnings aside,
4 Judah trusted in their military alliances and their right worship. Instead of worshipping God
5 alone, they worshipped themselves and their own perceived righteousness.

6 So, back to Jeremiah in Jerusalem. As we see from the fates of King Jehoiachin and King
7 Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar had an ingenious deportation program that allowed him to keep
8 peace at home and in the far territories. He deliberately took the most essential citizens first –
9 the leaders, the craftsmen, the builders, the bankers, the doctors, the priests – and left those
10 less able behind. Nebuchadnezzar conducted a series of deportations and with each, repeated
11 the same formula. So we find Jeremiah left behind with the losers among the losers. He
12 himself has prophesied that God's promise rests among the exiled – that the Remnant to
13 return, foretold by Isaiah, would come from Babylon. Those left behind, clinging to a crumbled
14 temple in a devastated land, are not those who hold God's blessing.

15 So that is the situation when our story opens.

16 The offer from Jeremiah's cousin, to buy the field at Anathoth is completely absurd on two
17 levels. The first we have already discussed – on a strictly practical level, purchasing occupied
18 territory on the outskirts of a soon-to-be-occupied city is nuts. It seems even crazier from a
19 faith perspective. Jeremiah is among the losers of the losers, imprisoned by the loser king. The
20 promise is gone from this place. The prophet Ezekiel sees clearly through a vision that the glory
21 of the Lord, the presence of the God of Israel, has left the temple – this place is now forsaken
22 and the promise rests among the Exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah himself will not see that promise.
23 Historians tell us that he left the city with refugees fleeing its destruction and most likely died
24 among them in Egypt.

25 But this is not an offer and story about good common sense, or sound investments, or
26 opportunities for personal gain. It's a story about leadership and responsibility in the context of
27 faith and hope and love. God says, *Buy [the] field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin...*
28 *[for] Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.* Jeremiah believes him.
29 Jeremiah acts. God says, buy the land and Jeremiah puts cash on the barrel head. He swallows
30 hard and steps out into the abyss: no net, no security, no false hopes of an 11th hour save, of an
31 oasis just over the horizon. Jeremiah literally puts his money where his mouth is in one
32 audacious act that screams confidence that all God has promised, all Jeremiah has prophesied,
33 is true and will be true to the glory of God. No matter that the most powerful army in the world
34 is camped on this land. No matter that Jeremiah will never live to see the promise realized. No
35 matter that there is not one scrap of evidence that God's people will ever turn back to God.

36 Somebody has got to go first. Jeremiah says, "Why not? Give me the paper! I'll sign on the
37 dotted line! I AM the Chosen of the God and the Servant of God and I WILL follow God blindly
38 and boldly into the great unknown!

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1 **III. Questions for Reflection**

- 2 • Are there ways that our world today resonates with the world of Jeremiah?
- 3 ○ Like the people of Israel do we feel pressure to worship idols instead of God?
4 What priorities threaten to occupy our hearts and block our service to God and
5 to one another? What “safety nets” might ultimately stand between us and
6 God’s love?
- 7 ○ Like the people of Judah, are we tempted to pride ourselves on our own
8 righteousness and to turn our backs on God’s grace? How do you see this at
9 work in our world? In our church? Do you see ways we obsess about winning,
10 seeking victory over our rivals? Ways we monitor the speck in our neighbor’s
11 eye rather than addressing the log that obstructs our own vision? How? In what
12 contexts?
- 13 • What might be our “Anathoth moments?” – our opportunities to step out in faith, to act
14 in the world with reckless abandon and trust in God?
- 15 ○ In a world of anxiety and fear, how do we live out our trust and hope in God’s
16 providence?
- 17 ○ In a world of anger and hostility, how do we live out our commitment to worship
18 God alone and to take care of each other?
- 19 ○ In a church addressing its own forms of anxiety and hostility, what types of tired
20 logic keep us locked in unhealthy patterns? What are audacious ways we might
21 step out in new directions, proclaiming our faith that God is at work in our
22 church?

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24 Note: This study builds on work that contributed to my Annual Conference sermon, preached
25 Wednesday evening, June 28, 2017.

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