Hi,

Here’s today’s updates:

* My Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today at noon on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Right now, there are about as many predictions about the future as there are pundits to make them. The truth is that no one really knows. So, knowing God as we do, the question is whether we will make a bet on the future, as Jeremiah did 2600 years ago?

**Jeremiah 32:6-15 (The Message)**

**Jeremiah said, “God’s Message came to me like this: Prepare yourself! Hanamel, your uncle Shallum’s son, is on his way to see you. He is going to say, ‘Buy my field in Anathoth. You have the legal right to buy it.’**

**And sure enough, just as God had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me while I was in jail and said, ‘Buy my field in Anathoth in the territory of Ben-jamin, for you have the legal right to keep it in the family. Buy it. Take it over.’**

**That did it. I knew it was God’s Message.”**

**“So I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel. I paid him seventeen silver shekels. I followed all the proper procedures: In the presence of witnesses I wrote out the bill of sale, sealed it, and weighed out the money on the scales. Then I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy that contained the contract and its conditions and also the open copy—and gave them to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah. All this took place in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and the witnesses who had signed the deed, as the Jews who were at the jail that day looked on.**

**“Then, in front of all of them, I told Baruch, ‘These are orders from God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel: Take these documents—both the sealed and the open deeds—and put them for safekeeping in a pottery jar. For God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel, says, “Life is going to return to normal. Homes and fields and vineyards are again going to be bought in this country.”’**

More than a few years ago, *Early Edition* was a popular television series. It told the story of a young man who was visited daily by a yellow cat delivering a copy of tomorrow’s paper, sending the hero on a mission to prevent a pending tragedy that the “early edition” revealed.

I guess as metaphor, Jeremiah is the cat. Both in word and deed, Jeremiah brought God’s message about Jerusalem’s coming destruction. Jeremiah brought this message to God’s people in what he said and, more so than any other prophet, in what he did. But whereas the cat turned the message over to someone ready to do something about it, Jeremiah’s message went unheeded. By the time we get to today’s Scripture passage in Jeremiah, the Babylonian army has besieged the city. By this time, it doesn’t take a magical cat or a prophet of God for everyone to know what comes next – devastation and exile.

*The Book of Consolation*

We know Jeremiah better than we do any other of the Old Testament prophets. The other prophets’ work consisted largely of bringing God’s messages to the people. The prophets were speakers of God’s words. But with Jeremiah, God went further. Jeremiah not only brought God’s messages, he was told to enact God’s messages in dramatic demonstrations. For example, God tells Jeremiah to stand in front of the temple and proclaim judgment upon the temple (ch. 7). Jeremiah is told to wear a loincloth and then bury it in some rocks, where it is ruined, symbolizing the relationship between the people and God – once as close as we wear clothing and now in ruins (ch. 13). Jeremiah is not to take a wife, for God has been cheated upon by his “wife,” his people (ch. 16). Jeremiah is sent to a potter’s house to see pottery destroyed (ch. 18). He smashes an earthenware jug, just as Judah is about to be smashed (ch. 19).

After all this and more, we are relieved when we get to chapters 30-33, for these are often called Jeremiah’s little book of consolation. These four chapters express a message of hope and restoration. That after all the destruction and exile, God will restore the people to their own land and to freedom. In his commentary on Jeremiah, R. E. Clements writes:

“Beyond the judgments which have taken place, therefore, the Book of Jeremiah asserts categorically that hope remained real: After all that had occurred in bringing ruin and devastation to Judah, there would be divine restoration. The twin themes of return and restoration to a full national existence provide the essential content of the prophetic message of hope, and this message is substantially the same in all four of the great prophetic collections. Eventually and certainly Israel would be saved (30:7); and this word of hope contains an implied assumption that salvation would consist of Israel’s becoming a nation once again, free from all the restraints and impositions of foreign rule. Israel would become free, prosperous, and honored under the just government of a Davidic king (cf. 33:19–26).”

*Sure, I’ll take that bet*

In today’s passage, Jeremiah is given another symbolic action to accomplish. With the Babylonian army arrayed outside the walls of Jerusalem, God tells Jeremiah to go out and buy a plot of land in his hometown of Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Don’t you wonder what was going through Jeremiah’s mind? This must have seemed as idiotic to him as it would to anyone else. The death of Israel is at hand and Jeremiah is supposed to go make a land investment. Five times in this brief passage, Jeremiah makes it clear that this is God’s doing, saying “Thus says the Lord.” Based on all the other stuff God had told him to do, Jeremiah probably figured that the land would be lost, just as the loincloth was ruined and the earthenware jug broken.

But instead, v. 15 makes clear that this time, the action is not an enactment of loss but of hope. God is having Jeremiah buy the land for the future, the day when the Israelites would return to Judah. Jeremiah was going to make a profit on this field of hope.

Notice also the care that is paid to the details in this story. There are witnesses, the money is weighed, the deed carefully preserved. This is a symbolic act, but it is also quite real. Jeremiah is putting real money on the line. He is not just standing on the promises of God, he is betting on them!

Jeremiah is investing in the future, but it is not merely educated guesswork. Jeremiah’s bet is an act of trust and hope. There is risk to it. Jeremiah may be God’s prophet, but he is still a man, still one of us, subject to the same fears and uncertainties as all humans. If you doubt this, just picture Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even our Lord and Savior was not immune to fear.

But regardless of how risky this investment might have seemed to him, Jeremiah lays out the money because his hope rests on his confidence in the promises of God. His hope and our own is not a matter of mere wishes or carefully calculated probabilities. In the same way, our hope lies in our confidence that God is faithful and that all will be well.

*A bit more on the Babylonian exile*

God told Jeremiah to buy a plot of land in Judah, even though God has promised that ruin and exile are about to fall on the land and the people.

It is probably difficult for us to grasp the shock of exile. Sometime around 800BC, Homer, the Greek epic poet, wrote “for there is nothing dearer to a man than his own country and his parents, and however splendid a home he may have in a foreign country, if it be far from father or mother, he does not care about it.” We live in a very mobile society. Corporate moves are a staple of our lives. Somehow, we must emotionally connect with the ancient Israelites and the depth of their despair.

*Just imagine* . . . It is 586 BC. You are a member of the house of Judah, living in Jerusalem. God, the Lord, the creator of everything, has chosen you to be his people! And he has given you the land of Canaan. He has given you a king, having promised centuries before that someone from the house of David would forever sit on the throne of Israel. But now . . . the hated Babylonians are running through the streets of Jerusalem. In the distance, you see the temple burning. In your heart, you know that the most sacred of all objects in Israel, the Ark of the Covenant, is lost. Surely, the pagans will simply carry it off and melt it down. You harbor the hope that God will come riding in at the last minute to save you -- again. But not this time . . . instead, soldiers appear at your door ordering you and your family to join the caravans headed into exile in Babylonia. As you leave Jerusalem, you see that only the poorest of families are left behind. The city lies in ruin and death hangs in the air.

It is in the face of such devastation that God tells Jeremiah to buy the plot of land, to make a bet on the future. Are we ready to make such a bet?

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott