

# *Vision Bigger Than Us*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3<sup>rd</sup> in an eight-part series

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### *Genesis 23:17-20*

<sup>17</sup>So the field of Ephron in Machpelah near Mamre—the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the field’s boundaries—was officially transferred <sup>18</sup>to Abraham as his property in the presence of the Hittites and of everyone at his city’s gate. <sup>19</sup>After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre, that is, Hebron, in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup>The field and the cave in it were officially transferred from the Hittites to Abraham as his burial property.

### *1 Chronicles 22:5–10 (CEB)*

<sup>5</sup>David thought, “My son Solomon is too inexperienced to build the LORD’s temple. It must be great beyond compare in order to win fame and glory throughout all lands, so I myself will prepare things for him.” So David made extensive preparations before his death.

<sup>6</sup>David sent for his son Solomon and instructed him to build a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>7</sup>David said to Solomon, “My son, I had intended to build a temple for the name of the LORD my God. <sup>8</sup>But the LORD told me: You’ve shed much blood and waged great wars. You won’t build a temple for my name because you’ve spilled so much blood on the ground before me. <sup>9</sup>A son has just been born to you. He’ll be a man of peace, and I’ll give him peace with all his surrounding enemies. In fact, his name will be Solomon, and I’ll give Israel peace and quiet during his reign. <sup>10</sup>He will be the one to build a temple for my name. He’ll become my son, and I’ll become his father, and I’ll establish his royal throne over Israel forever.

### *Jeremiah 32:6–15 (CEB)*

<sup>6</sup>Jeremiah said, The LORD’s word came to me: <sup>7</sup>Your cousin Hanamel, Shallum’s son, is on his way to see you; and when he arrives, he will tell you: “Buy my field in Anathoth, for by law you are next in line to purchase it.” <sup>8</sup>And just as the LORD had said, my cousin Hanamel showed up at the prison quarters and told me, “Buy my field in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for you are next in line and have a family obligation to purchase it.” Then I was sure this was the LORD’s doing.

<sup>9</sup>So I bought the field in Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup>I signed the deed, sealed it, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. <sup>11</sup>Then I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy, with its terms and conditions, and the unsealed copy—<sup>12</sup>and gave it to Baruch, Neriah’s son and Mahseiah’s grandson, before my cousin Hanamel and the witnesses named in the deed, as well as before all the Judeans who were present in the prison quarters. <sup>13</sup>I charged Baruch before all of them: <sup>14</sup>“The LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims: Take these documents—this sealed deed of purchase along with the unsealed one—and put them into a clay container so they will last a long time. <sup>15</sup>The LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims: Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in this land.”

*How far into the future can you see?*

You may remember Randy Pausch. He was a professor at Carnegie-Mellon when he was struck down by pancreatic cancer. After he knew that he was terminally ill, he delivered what he called, “The Last Lecture,” and wrote a book by that name. In the lecture, he spoke about what he had learned in life and what he hoped to pass on to his students and his own children.

One of the things Pausch said in an interview at the time was this: “You don’t have to preach at people; just tell them the story and they’ll figure it out for themselves.” He was on to something deeply important and even biblical in this. The Bible isn’t a book

of well-crafted messages exhorting us to this or that way of life. Instead, it is a library of stories, some vast, some brief. It is through these stories that God reveals himself to us and helps us to know ourselves. After we step through all three of today's stories, you'll probably agree that no preaching is needed.

#### *Land for a grave*

"What am I to do?," Abraham muttered to himself as he rocked back and forth in his sorrow. His beloved Sarah had died and there was no place to bury her. So many years in this land and, still, Abraham was an alien, a stranger, an immigrant with no land to call his own.

This is Sarah, he thought, the mother of Isaac, their unexpected, never-even-dreamed-of son whom God had given them. Their descendants would be more numerous than the stars, God said. But now all that had faded away in Abraham's grief.

After awhile, Abraham gathered himself and came up with a plan. God had promised that this land would belong to Abraham's family forever and so perhaps now was the time to get on with it. Abraham would buy some land from the local Hittites.

So he did. Indeed, Abraham got just the land he wanted, for though still an alien in the land, Abraham was well-known and much admired. After the usual rounds of much – enjoyed bargaining, the price was set and paid. In front of the gathered Hittites, Abraham took possession of the deed. An alien no longer, Abraham rested in the promises of God. The vision God had shown him long ago was coming to pass – as it always had and always would.

#### *Sometimes it takes a father and a son*

David knew it was the truth as soon as God said it. Though he had desperately wanted to build a proper home for God, David had spilled far too much blood. The blood of Uriah had never washed off his hands. Yes . . . God had been just when he said it would have to be David's son, Solomon, who would build the temple. It was hard. Hard to admit. Hard to endure. But so be it. It was right.

But at least David could help. He could get things started. Solomon was much too inexperienced for such a project. So, in a way, David and Solomon would build it together. David would make all the preparations and, after his death, Solomon would take over and complete construction. At least David could do that much.

So David oversaw the writing of plans and organizing of the work. He raised vast sums of money. He ordered materials, calling on some of his friends and allies to send the very best. He even called in Solomon and explained to him that it would be Solomon's privilege to build the temple. David admitted to his son that he had spilled far too much blood to be the builder of God's home – a point God had made quite clear to him.

And so the building of God's temple would span generations. Not just the generations of kings, but also of the masons, stonecutters, and the rest. The temple would take a long time to build and would stand for four centuries before being destroyed by the Babylonians.

#### *Betting on God's vision is always a sure thing!*

Twenty 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, the prophet Jeremiah is the cat from *Early Edition*. Both in word and deed, Jeremiah brought God's message about Jerusalem's coming destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. 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. It didn't take a magical cat or even a prophet of God to know what was coming – devastation and exile. Utter ruin. The death of Jerusalem.

In the face of sure ruin, Jeremiah is given yet 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.<sup>1</sup>

Don't you wonder what was going through Jeremiah's mind? This must have seemed as idiotic to him as it would have 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 (Jeremiah 13) and the earthenware jug broken (Jeremiah 19).

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. That's how it is with God; we despair or fear because we refuse to see as far ahead as God would have us see. Trusting God ought to give us some mighty long-term spectacles, enabling us to see far past our own fleeting lives.

Jeremiah is betting on the future, but it is not merely educated guesswork. Jeremiah's purchase 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 still, Jesus and Jeremiah trusted God.

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. Our hope lies in our confidence that God is faithful. Our hope lies in the will of God. Our hope lies in God's vision.

*Seeing ahead . . . far, far ahead*

When I was first on staff at St. Andrew, I remember walking through the just-completed St. Andrew sanctuary with Rev. Leighton Farrell, our Executive Pastor at the time. Leighton had been the long-time Senior Pastor of Highland Park UMC and had sent Robert Hasley far north to start St. Andrew. As we walked through the building, Leighton told me he hoped I appreciated the work done by our building committee. They had taken the long view and built a campus that would still be used a century later. They could have taken the short-term view, he said, as so many churches had. They could have put up pre-fab buildings, which would have been faster and cheaper. Instead, the building committee understood that the St. Andrew congregation had undertaken the building project not merely for their own use or even their children's, but for many generations to come. You see, God takes the long view, he plays the long game . . . and so must we.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Often, the longest-lasting and most significant visions are those that span multiple generations. Gaudi's La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona was begun in 1882 and is

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<sup>1</sup>Since Anathoth was a few miles from Jerusalem, Jeremiah would have had to go and buy the land during one of the occasional respites from the lengthy siege warfare of Nebuchadnezzar.

still under construction. Yet, its majestic and striking architecture attracts millions from all over the world. As you look into the future, what of your own vision might involve generations that come after you? If your answer is, “not much,” how can you go about building a larger, more lasting vision?

2. The St. Andrew Master Plan approved last fall looks out thirty years. How can we get enthusiastic over something that some of us will never see? How realistic is it to try to see that far into the future? How can we, as a congregation, create and act on a vision that withstands the changes and challenges that surely lie ahead? What is your part in it?
3. God’s rescue plan for humanity began nearly two millennia before Jesus and is still being worked out. Talk about long-term! Spend some time talking about what you think St. Andrew might be in a hundred years. What are your hopes and dreams over the next century for this corner of Christ’s body?

## Daily Bible Readings

**Monday, Jeremiah 1:4-10** God calls Jeremiah

**Tuesday, Jeremiah 4:5-18** Disaster is coming!

**Wednesday, Jeremiah 11:1-17** The broken covenant with God

**Thursday, Jeremiah 18** God is the potter and he can do with the clay what he wants.

**Friday, Jeremiah 19:1-20:6** God has Jeremiah smash an earthen jug, enacting the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

**Saturday, Jeremiah 29** A letter of hope even in the midst of pending doom.

## Scott Engle’s Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own.

This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Genesis

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the Gospel of Luke

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

## Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

**A new series started Jan 8: *Simply Good News: Reading the gospels with N. T. Wright***