

A Sound Investment?

<i>Text</i>	Jeremiah 32
<i>Readings</i>	Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 16:1-9
<i>Theme</i>	The Lord commands Jeremiah to buy family land in the certainty of the return from exile.
<i>Purpose</i>	To show that nothing is impossible for God and he will always keep his promises no matter how bleak the circumstances appear to us.

A lot of people are wanting to make wise investments with their money and they'll go looking for investment advice. There are plenty of books and magazines and newspapers that offer this sort of guidance.

Some will tell you to invest your money in shares.

Others will advise unit trusts.

Others will direct you to put it in the bank.

Many will recommend you put it into property.

If you are looking at investment in property there are a number of things you need to consider. Real estate people will tell you that the three key things are: location, location and location! Buy in a good street and in a good area.

Of course, there are other considerations as well. It's good to purchase a house or land in a buyers' market, when more people are selling than buying; then you'll be buying at a good price and you'll look to making a good return when you sell.

You need to buy wisely. You want to make a sound investment. So you need to get good advice.

The prophet Jeremiah was about to buy some property. He received advice from the most reliable source possible – from the Lord himself! But he had some doubts about this investment. He wasn't sure he was doing the right thing. Sure it was a buyers' market, but to him it did not seem the best time to buy.

1. Let's consider why as we look at **his purchase**; then we will consider his Prayer; and then God's Promise.

As we have seen, when you are buying property you need to consider the overall market **situation**. What is going on in the economy?

What are the prospects for the future?

What is the forecast for the property market in the next 10, 20 or 30 years?

The prospects for Jerusalem looked bleak indeed. The Babylonian empire was the dominant world power and they were busy extending their rule. They had already come against Judea and Jerusalem in 605 BC and again in 597 BC. On both of those occasions they had taken people from Jerusalem away into exile.

Now they were camped outside the walls of Jerusalem for the third, and what would be the final, time. This was it.

The city was given a temporary reprieve when the Egyptian army advanced towards Jerusalem. The Babylonians had lifted the siege for a short time to face this new threat, but the Egyptians had retreated and now the Babylonian army was back again.

Jeremiah himself was in prison. When the Babylonians had retreated he had tried to go out to the territory of Benjamin to get his share of the property there. But on his way out he had been falsely accused of deserting to the Babylonians and had been imprisoned in the courtyard of the guard, which was part of the palace of the king. (Jeremiah 37-38).

One day while he was imprisoned there his cousin Hanamel came to visit. Most people who visit someone in prison go there because they want to bring some comfort or help to those they are visiting. But not cousin Hanamel. Someone has described him as one of the “all-time wheeler-dealers of the Old Testament”!

We don't know why he wanted to sell the family farm. Maybe he could see the writing on the wall and wanted to get something out of the family estate before the city fell. Maybe he was deep in debt and needed some silver to pay off his creditors.

Whatever the reason he gave the hard-sell to his cousin in prison; he laid on him the responsibility for buying. He would have made a good car-salesman because he really put the pressure on his cousin; (verse 7) “Buy my field at Anathoth because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.”

One of the Old Testament laws specified that property had to remain in the family. If land had to be sold the relatives had to buy it to maintain the family inheritance (Leviticus 25:23-25)

The problem was that the bottom was about to fall out of the property market. No one in his right mind would have bought land at that time. Sure, it was a buyers' market but it was not a good time to invest. That field at Anathoth was occupied by the enemy. Real estate values were tumbling. The price of house and land was heading for an all time low and there were no immediate prospects for a recovery.

Moreover, Jeremiah was in prison and unlikely to get out; so he was in no position to farm the land himself or even to manage it.

But Jeremiah had already received instructions from **his investment adviser** – the Lord himself. The Lord had warned him that his crafty cousin was on his way and had told him to accept the offer. Why was that?

The Lord was taking a long term view. He knew what was going to happen in the future: one day the people of Judah would return to this land; and houses, fields and vineyards would once again be bought and sold.

In 70 years time the people would return and the economy would pick up and life would go back to normal. The Lord knew this would happen because he had planned it and he would bring it about. So Jeremiah bought the land.

The actual purchase followed all the regulations of that day. This was the 6th century BC and coins had not yet been thought of, so buying and selling was done by barter, or by silver or gold. Jeremiah paid 17 shekels of silver which was carefully weighed out in front of witnesses and others who were in the courtyard. Two copies of the purchase agreement were drawn up and signed; one was sealed and the other was left unsealed.

Then Jeremiah asked his friend Baruch to place both copies in a clay jar so they would last a long time. Clay jars were sealed with pitch to keep them airtight.

From archaeological discoveries we know that this system for preserving documents was very effective. In 1947 some shepherd boys were throwing stones into a caves near the Dead Sea in Palestine and they heard the sound of breaking pottery. When they investigated they discovered some very old scrolls stored in clay jars. These were scrolls of various parts of the Old Testament, and they have become known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were in remarkable condition even though they had been there since the 1st century BC, that is, for 2000 years!

No doubt, when the exiles returned 70 years later, these documents of Jeremiah were still in good order.

These strange events happened a long time ago but they still have **application to us**.

In his commentary Phillip Ryken points out that Christians today make many decisions that are strange in the eyes of the world.

For instance, some Christians marry. Why would you do that now when you can have a civil union? And why do that when the divorce rate is so high? Believers do this in obedience to God. They want to honour marriage and keep the marriage bed pure (Hebrews 13:4).

Some Christians give up successful careers and bright prospects to go overseas as missionaries. Think of the runner Eric Liddell featured in that great movie, *Chariots of Fire*. He had a brilliant future in running but he gave that up to be a missionary to China.

Many Christians give 10% of their income to the Lord for his church and kingdom.

People in the world think we are crazy! Fancy giving away all that money when you could spend it on your own pleasure.

But we know there is more to life than what we buy and build up in this life.

Just as Jeremiah made an investment into the future beyond the exile, so too we are investing in a future beyond this world.

We are storing up treasures in heaven “where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20).

We use our wealth wisely so that, when it is gone, we “will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9).

Be obedient to all God’s commands, even if you don’t fully understand them.

Follow God’s will, not for short term gain, but with your eye on an eternal future.

2. Immediately after this Jeremiah **prayed**. This is the second feature of this chapter we want to consider.

It’s not uncommon that after you have made a purchase you to have some second thoughts. You have some doubts. Have I done the right thing? Was this a wise investment? Should I have bought that other property or not bought at all? Jeremiah too had some doubts. In response he did the best thing he could have done – he prayed to the Lord. That is a good reminder for us; in times of uncertainty and doubt and anxiety the best thing you can do is to bring it to God in prayer. His prayer is a fine example of how to pray when you are in a desperate situation (Kidner).

He began by acknowledging God’s **power**.

God was the Sovereign Lord. He was in control. “You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power....Nothing is too hard for you.” (verse 17)

He is the “great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds.” (verses 18b-19a).

We would do well to remind ourselves of God’s power. Often we have a very small view of God and his power. But he is the Lord Almighty.

He also knew that God was **just**.

He sees everything that goes on in all the earth. "You reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve" (verse 19). That was especially relevant because of the sin of the people of Judah. God would punish Israel for their disobedience.

Donald Barnhouse has said that hell is the only logical doctrine in the Bible. He overstated that to make the point, but the point is well taken. God is just and he will do what is just. He will punish sin. If people rebel against him he will send them away out of his sight. If people reject the offer of life through faith in Jesus Christ God will reject them. The ultimate punishment is that of hell.

But God is also a God of **love**.

Jeremiah went back to the greatest demonstration of that love when the Lord had rescued the people of Israel out of Egypt. This was *the* great event of Israel's history. That was the defining moment in their nationhood. Time and again they looked back to this deliverance as the greatest evidence of God's mercy and power.

That Exodus deliverance was a picture of what God would do in his Son, Jesus. Just as he rescued Israel out of slavery in Egypt so too he rescues all believers out of the slavery of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But Jeremiah knew that the people of Israel had not responded to God's love. God had given them this land but they had not obeyed him or followed his law or kept his commands. They had broken the covenant.

That was why the Babylonians were besieging the city – this was God's doing. This was his punishment for their evil and rebellion.

In the light of the present situation and the knowledge that the city would be handed over to the Babylonians, Jeremiah wondered why on earth the Lord wanted him to buy this field! This was not a good time to buy!

This did not seem like a sound investment!

He had some doubts about the wisdom of what he had done.

Yet you can see from his prayer that he trusted in God. There did not seem to be much reason to hope, but he never lost hope because he never lost his faith and confidence in God. And out of that faith he continued to do what God wanted him to do. He obeyed God's commands.

You need to do the same, especially when your faith is tested. Yes, sometimes our situation does seem hopeless.

It might seem that way in your own life with all that is going on and all the pressures you face.

It might seem like that in your marriage, or in your family and with your children.

It might seem like that in our nation as we see a rapid slide away from God and his laws.

But through faith we believe that God is all powerful. He has plans for us his people – plans that will be fulfilled in an eternal future.

3. The Lord responded to this prayer with **a promise**. This is the third feature of this chapter we want to consider.

The Lord reminded Jeremiah of how he had begun his prayer when he had acknowledged **God's great power** – “Nothing is too hard for you” (verse 17). In verse 27 the Lord came back to this; “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?” Usually the Lord doesn't have to say much to set us on the right track. Even his questions are enough to answer our doubts and misgivings. Think of the questions he asked of Job after all his long speeches. Those questions were enough for him. So too for Jeremiah. Of course it will work out! Is anything too hard for God?!

He also reaffirmed **his justice**.

The Babylonians would capture the city.

They would break in through its gates and would set it on fire and burn it down.

This would happen because of the terrible sin of the people of Judah. They had rebelled against the Lord, turned their back on him and worshipped and served idols.

They had even sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire to the pagan god Molech. This is why they would be destroyed.

The punishment would fit the crime. Terrible sins would be met with a terrible judgement.

But this punishment would **not be the end**.

The Lord would act in a surprising manner. Yes, he would send them away, but then he would bring them back to their land. He would banish them from their city, but later on he would gather them again to this place and let them live in safety (verse 37). The city would be destroyed, but then it would be rebuilt.

This is why the Lord told Jeremiah to buy the family property. The prophet had to put his money where his mouth was. He had prophesied that there would be a return from exile. He had promised the people

that after 70 years they could come back. So this land would remain in the family. It would be farmed again. So this was a sound investment. Derek Kidner comments – “seventeen shekels of silver were surely never better spent.”

This block of land that he had bought as a future investment was representative of the whole land of Israel. The Jews would come back and they would resettle this land. It would be repopulated, fields would be replanted, and cities would be rebuilt.

The Lord would do this because of his covenant. This was the agreement between the Lord and his people where he promised; “I will be your God and you will be my people.” It was a promise of a relationship – a union between them.

But the Lord promised that in the future the covenant relationship would be *even better*; “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.”

That promise was fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Messiah, the One God had promised throughout that Old Testament period. Just before his death he took one of the cups of the Passover and told his disciples; “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Today we live in this New Covenant. We have been delivered out of slavery to sin by the power of God in his Son. Through Jesus God promises us; “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

And in response he calls you to obey him, even when some of his commands seem strange; even when you think you have a better idea.

And he calls you to trust him, even when the future looks bleak and hopeless.

And he calls you to hope – to look forward to the time when God will gather all his people to a new land – to a new heaven and the new earth – where we live in safety forever.

Be sure you invest yourself and your time and your money into that eternal property. That will be a sound investment!

Amen.

Note: A sermon by Dr Phillip Ryken in a book of sermons on Jeremiah was useful in the writing of this sermon, and others in this series.