

**3. ‘NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE
FOR YHWH’ (32:17)**

JEREMIAH 32-33

The year of Jerusalem's destruction

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar.

²At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, ³where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says YHWH: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; ⁴King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; ⁵and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says YHWH; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

We have already witnessed an encounter between Jeremiah and Zedekiah (see 21:1-7), and there are more to come in the Jeremiah scroll (see 37:3-7, 17-21; 38:14-28). The year is 588 (verse 1). Jerusalem is under siege (verse 2). It is likely that the following scene is understood as taking place during the brief period when the Egyptian army broke the siege (see 37:12). Jeremiah is considered a danger because of his pro-Babylonian stance, and is 'confined in the court of the guard' (verses 2-3).

Jeremiah has been consistent in warning the king and the people, in YHWH's name, of the outcome of the siege. King Zedekiah is keeping Jeremiah out of circulation, not wanting to weaken the resolve of the city, and he is questioning him about his dire warnings (verses 3-5).

Shallum and his son, Hanamel, are attempting to sell some land. Either he has come upon hard times, or he expects the land to fall into enemy hands. Hanamel comes to his cousin, Jeremiah, who, as next of kin, has first right to buy the property. According to the law as expressed in Leviticus 25:25-32), the next of kin is obliged to 'redeem' the property in order to keep it in the family.

Jeremiah has been ostracised from the family (12:6). He takes the visit as confirmation of a communication he received from YHWH (verse 6) instructing him to buy the property in spite of the prevailing conditions. He may also see it as an opportunity to show his loyalty to his family.

Buying property at such a time would act as a sign to the inhabitants of the city that Jerusalem will be restored and that the ordinary affairs of daily life will be part of the restoration.

Verse 12 is the first time Baruch is mentioned in the Jeremiah scroll. He is a likely source for some of the biographical traditions that stand behind some of the stories contained in the scroll, including this transaction.

6Jeremiah said, The word of YHWH came to me: 7Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." 8Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of YHWH, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of YHWH.

9And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the unsealed copy; 12and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard.

13In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this unsealed deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time.

15For thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

¹⁶After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to YHWH, saying: ¹⁷Ah Lord YHWH! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is impossible for you.

¹⁸You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation, but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God whose name is YHWH of hosts, ¹⁹great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings.

²⁰You showed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all humankind, and have have won renown that continues to this very day. ²¹You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; ²²and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; ²³and they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or follow your law; of all you commanded them to do, they did nothing. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them.

²⁴See, the siege-ramps have been cast up against the city to take it, and the city, faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has happened, as you yourself can see.

²⁵Yet you, O Lord YHWH, have said to me, "Buy the field for money and get witnesses"—though the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

This prayer, typical of the cult, is placed here on the lips of Jeremiah, who is portrayed as having complete confidence in YHWH's power in spite of the disaster that was happening to YHWH's city and temple. Jeremiah is being presented as a model of trust and hope.

Much of the language is typical of the Deuteronomic School, who appear to have played a significant role in the editing and production of the Jeremiah scroll. For verse 18 compare:

showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

– Deuteronomy 5:10

For verses 20-22 compare:

YHWH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

– Deuteronomy 26:8-9

Verse 25 expresses Jeremiah's wonderment. YHWH's instruction for him to buy the field at such an inauspicious time stands as a sign that YHWH is still powerful and still intends the land for his people. It is a guarantee that the land will be restored.

This theological reflection is presented as YHWH's response to Jeremiah's prayer. Verse 27 echoes verse 17.

The authors of this passage are reinforcing the message that the disaster of 587 was brought about by YHWH as punishment for the obstinate infidelity of Judah – the same kind of behaviour that brought about the collapse of Israel.

Verses 34-35 pick up part of what was presented earlier as Jeremiah's declaration at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim:

For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says YHWH; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.

– Jeremiah 7:30-31

The 'valley of the son of Hinnom' (Hebrew *ge ben hinnom*) is the 'gehenna' (English 'hell') of the New Testament. The sacrifices to Molech are noted in 2Kings 23:20.

²⁶The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah: ²⁷See, I am YHWH, the God of all flesh; is anything impossible for me?

²⁸Therefore, thus says YHWH: I am going to give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he shall take it. ²⁹The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come, set it on fire, and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger. ³⁰For the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, says YHWH. ³¹This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight ³²because of all the evil of the people of Israel and the people of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger—they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the citizens of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³³They have turned their backs to me, not their faces; though I have taught them persistently, they would not listen and accept correction. ³⁴They set up their idols in the house that bears my name, and defiled it. ³⁵They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination, causing Judah to sin.

³⁶Now therefore thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, "It is being given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence".

³⁷See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety. ³⁸They shall be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

⁴²For thus says YHWH: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them. ⁴³Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

⁴⁴Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says YHWH.

In this passage the presentation of the reasons for YHWH's decision to have the city destroyed gives way to YHWH's assurance that all will be well.

The covenant formula is repeated (verse 38): 'They shall be my people and I will be their God'. This is possible only because of YHWH's creative initiative of giving Israel a new heart (verse 39).

This covenant will be 'everlasting' (verse 40; compare Ezekiel 16:60; Isaiah 55:3; 61:8).

All this will take place because of God's 'faithfulness' (verse 41).

The theological reflection concludes by bringing the reader back to Jeremiah's purchasing of land (see the opening verses of chapter 32). This is a sign of the promise made by YHWH out of his love and faithfulness to 'restore their fortunes' (verse 44).

In verse 1 Jeremiah is in the same confinement as in chapter 12 (see 12:2). In verse 2 we are reminded that YHWH is the all-powerful creator.

Verses 4-5 describe the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the reason for it: 'I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness'.

Verses 6-13 are typical of later editing of the scroll. They provide balance and hope by assuring the reader that the horror of the siege is not YHWH's last word. The one who is punishing them will surely heal and bless them, for that is the nature of YHWH and that is what YHWH has promised.

There will once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of YHWH.'

¹The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard:

²Thus says YHWH who made the earth, YHWH who formed it to establish it—YHWH is his name: ³Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

⁴For thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege-ramps and before the sword: ⁵The Chaldeans are coming in to fight and to fill them with the dead bodies of those whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness.

⁶I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

¹⁰Thus says YHWH: In this place of which you say, "It is a waste without human beings or animals," in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there will once more be heard ¹¹the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of YHWH: "Give thanks to YHWH of hosts, for YHWH is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says YHWH.

¹²Thus says YHWH of hosts: In this place that is waste, without human beings or animals, and in all its towns there shall again be pasture for shepherds resting their flocks. ¹³In the towns of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places around Jerusalem, and in the towns of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says YHWH.

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "YHWH is our righteousness."

¹⁷For thus says YHWH: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ¹⁸and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

¹⁹The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah: ²⁰Thus says YHWH: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, ²¹only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites.

²²Just as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me.

²³The word of YHWH came to Jeremiah: ²⁴Have you not observed how these people say, "The two families that YHWH chose have been rejected by him," and how they hold my people in such contempt that they no longer regard them as a nation?

²⁵Thus says YHWH: Only if I had not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, ²⁶would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David and not choose any of his descendants as rulers over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.

This passage is clearly eschatological and Messianic. It is entirely lacking in the Septuagint. It may be one of the latest additions to the Jeremiah scroll, perhaps as late as the Maccabean period.

Verses 14-16 echo 23:5-6, which is in the context of the Messianic king.

The guaranteeing that 'David shall never lack a man' does not represent the teaching of Jeremiah (see 22:30). The promotion of the 'levitical priests'(verse 18) points to a period when, in the absence of a king, leadership of the community was exercised by the priests.

Verses 19-22 assert the conviction that YHWH's covenant with the Davidic dynasty remains. In the absence of an actual king, the hope is Messianic. Once again the priesthood is promoted.

The 'two families'(verse 24) may refer to Israel and Judah. They may also refer to the kingly and priestly families.

The argument in verses 25-26 echoes 31:35-36. At a time when people are losing hope and doubting YHWH's promises, the authors are attempting to focus attention on YHWH's faithfulness and mercy, and on restoration.