

# Surprising Investment

In the midst of seeming hopelessness, God provides surprising and radical gestures of hope. Though it may be difficult to understand, God's trustworthiness is sure, God's plans are hopeful, and God's faithfulness is comforting. In our faith rituals, we celebrate our relationship with God, even in times of chaos and stress.

## Focus Scripture: Jeremiah 32:1–3a, 6–15

In the shadows of the declining Assyrian empire, Babylon and Egypt were flexing their muscles in the region. Jeremiah had begun to warn the people of impending doom at the hands of the ever-expanding Babylonian Empire. True to Jeremiah's words, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem in 597 BCE and deported many of its citizens. Furthermore, against the advice of Jeremiah, those remaining in Judah launched an unsuccessful revolt, and the Babylonian army returned in 588 BCE to blockade Jerusalem and starve out the city.

Jeremiah agonized over the theological meaning behind such doom for the people of Judah. The reason for the fall of Jerusalem was not that the Babylonian god was stronger than Yahweh; rather, destruction came because God's people were worshipping the gods of Baal (fertility and prosperity god of the Canaanites) instead of Yahweh, making an alliance with Egypt, and not trusting in God.

While the Babylonian army was blockading the city, God told Jeremiah to buy a plot of land. Previously God had told Jeremiah to buy a loincloth to hide (13:1–11) and an earthenware jug to break (19:1–11). Now God tells Jeremiah to buy a field that he will not be able to plant or harvest.

The whole episode of Jeremiah buying the field from his cousin is based on "the law of redemption" (Leviticus 25:25–55). This law states that, should any property or any person within the family be in danger of being lost, it is the duty of the most senior family member to make sure it stays within the family. Because of the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah's cousin, Hanamel is destitute because he is unable to farm his field at Anathoth – Jeremiah's ancestral land. Hanamel visits Jeremiah in

prison and calls forth the law of redemption.

Jeremiah conducts the transfer of ownership in a conspicuous way. The prophet then orders his trusted companion Baruch to store the document in a safe place – in an earthenware jar that will keep for a long time.

Jeremiah's act seems incomplete and meaningless without God's words in verse 15: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." In fact, the whole passage seems meaningless without God's word to Jeremiah. "Thus says the Lord" appears five times in this short passage to indicate that this transaction is indeed God's plan; it is a sign of hope of God's promise of a future beyond the fall of Jerusalem.

Trusting in God's promises and following God's ways sometimes require great trust. When **Psalm 91:1–6, 14–16** is placed next to the focus passage, the psalmist's faith seems even more remarkable: God is faithful, answers our call, and is our refuge and protection. **First Timothy 6:6–9** makes a plea regarding the importance of keeping steadfast faith and the value of holding on to what really is life, rather than material wealth. **Luke 16:19–31** stresses that it is important to serve the neighbour with justice, hospitality, and compassion now – to wait may be too late.

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God's ways are trustworthy even in times of despair and hopelessness; these ways can be trusted even when they seem mysterious to us. What is holding you back – as an individual and as a church – from embracing God's exciting plans? What makes it possible to dare to trust in God's plans, even when they seem illogical? What are you and your church willing to sacrifice so that you might make a surprising investment in God's eternal ways?



September 26, 2010

**Focus Scripture**  
**Jeremiah 32:1–3a,**  
**6–15**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**Psalm 91:1–6, 14–16**  
**1 Timothy 6:6–19**  
**Luke 16:19–31**

*Seasons of the Spirit is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.*

**O God, help us to trust in you. May we learn to let go of the things that give us illusions of security, and embrace the goodness of your truth and love. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Some children in the world live in fear each day. With the ready access of television and the Internet children know more about frightening places in other parts of the globe than ever before. What do you think the children in your community fear? What will they admit to fearing? As you talk about fear together, they may be more willing to enter into the conversation if they can talk about the fear of other children, not their own fears. This too is helpful for them.

While the session begins with fears, it soon moves to hope. Where do you think

the children in your community, particularly in your group, find hope? Often children are reassured when the adults around them express their trust and hope in God, and when these adults clearly work to make the world a better place. Telling the children about the work of international as well as local groups that bring hope to others is reassuring for them too.

Pray that the children in your group will find hope in this story from Jeremiah and that hope will be present in their lives too.

September 26, 2010



### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Jeremiah 32:1–3a, 6–15, and biblical background material (p. 27). For more about the exile and contemporary Jews, read "The Meaning of Exile" (p. 107). What is significant about buying houses and vineyards for Jeremiah?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 8* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com). Bring songs "Let the People of God," "Stand, O Stand Firm," and "May Peace Be with You/Salamun Kullahee" (p. 2, 12, and 11, *Music Section*; also #27, #18, and #24 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth* for the Season after Pentecost, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*. Place *bookmark* at the beginning of Jeremiah. Display poster "Open Window" so the children can see it when seated.

#### Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story on *today's resource sheet* "Jeremiah's Field of Hope."

- ❑ For the story, bring *17 silver coins*, *candle*, and *matches*.
- ❑ For drama group, bring *today's resource sheet* "Jeremiah's Field of Hope" and simple *Bible costumes* (see "Bible Times Costumes," p. 101).
- ❑ For Bible detectives group, bring *copies of today's resource sheet* "Bible Detectives" and *directions*.

#### Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *plain white paper plates* (no plastic coating) and *yarn*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "Fresh as the Morning"* (pp. 8-9, *Music Section*; also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*). For your convenience, lyrics for the songs in the *Music Section* can be found in the Library of [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and in the "Song Lyrics" folder of *SeasonsDisk*.
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet* "Message of Hope"
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *poster "Revival Field"* and *directions*
- ❑ **Cooperation zone:** *17 silver coins* and *timer*

# Surprising Investment



## Scripture

Jeremiah 32:1–3a,  
6–15

**FOCUS** To discover, with Jeremiah, that God is with us even in difficult times.

## GATHER

Welcome the children and introduce guests or new children to the others. Play the song “Let the People of God” (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

### Opening ritual

**Call to learning** Light the Christ candle. Remind the group that its flame is a reminder of Jesus Christ’s presence with us. Invite the children to gaze at the poster *Open Window* and repeat each line of the call to learning after you:

This is the season after Pentecost.  
During this season,  
we will learn from prophets  
and disciples,  
from the psalm writer  
and apostle Paul.  
The Bible will be like a window  
open to God’s ways  
and wisdom.

**Song** Play the song “Let the People of God” (p. 2, *Music Section*; also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Encourage the children to sing with you. During the song, receive the offering.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Holy God, we gather to learn about you and how to follow Jesus. May our hearts and our minds be open to your teachings. Amen.

**Extinguish** the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

### Connecting with the focus

**Scary or frightening times** The Bible story takes place during a scary time in the history of Israel. To prepare the children to imagine living in a frightening time, ask:

#### ■ What would be a scary time for you?

They may be reluctant to admit fear at first, but encourage them to think what would make life scary or frightening. Perhaps it is a terrible storm or if war broke out. Admit that these times are scary for everyone, not only children. The Bible story for this session is during a very scary time for the people of Israel.

## ENGAGE

### Preparing for the story

**Hebrew Scriptures** The previous three sessions have focused on stories from the New Testament. Now we move to the Hebrew Scriptures. Invite a child to get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Hold it so the children can see it and ask:

■ **Is the story for today from the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament? What do you think?**

When they decide it is from the Hebrew Scriptures, remind them these are stories that Jesus would have heard as a child. The stories in the Hebrew Scriptures are many, many years older than the stories in the New Testament.

### The Bible story

**Jeremiah, the prophet** Read the name of the book: Jeremiah. Explain that Jeremiah was a prophet of God. God chose Jeremiah to teach the people about God and to give them messages from God. Before you tell the story, invite a child to turn to chapter 32 in Jeremiah. Then tell the story on today’s resource sheet “Jeremiah’s Field of Hope,” based on Jeremiah 32:1–3a, 6–15.

### Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Drama group** While the ideas behind the story may be complex, the actions of the story are quite simple. Provide simple costumes for the children

(see "Bible Times Costumes," p. 101). Select children to be Jeremiah, King Zedekiah, and Hanamel. Everyone else is a witness to the sale of the field. Tell the story from today's resource sheet "Jeremiah's Field of Hope" and have the children mime the actions. You may have to be more explicit about their actions than when you told the story earlier. Encourage them to exaggerate their actions.

**Bible detectives group** The children in this group will learn more about Jeremiah and his times. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Bible Detectives," Bibles, pencils, and these directions:

- 1 You will need a Bible, a copy of "Bible Detectives," and a pencil.
- 2 You can work on your own or with a partner.
- 3 Read and follow the directions on "Bible Detectives" and you will find out more about Jeremiah and what was happening.
- 4 Choose one piece of information to tell the others.



### The Bible story and us

**Play** the song "Stand, O Stand Firm" (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together. Invite the Bible detectives group to tell what they discovered. Ask:

- **How can we bring hope to others as we remember the hope from God?**

# 3 RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Hope banner** Buying a field during difficult and unsettled times was a sign of hope from God for Jeremiah. Invite the children to think of actions, words, or events that have given them hope for the world. Provide paper plates and markers for the children to illustrate or write about something that gives or has given them hope. Lay the plates out to create a square or rectangle. Punch holes in the adjoining sides and tie them together with yarn. Hang the hope banner where others can enjoy it.

- **Music zone: Song of assurance** We find hope in knowing that God is always with us. The chorus from "Fresh as the Morning" (pp. 8-9, *Music Section*; also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*) presents this message. Play it for the children; then read the words together or have them echo each line after you. The words are almost a shorthand way of saying that God is always with us. Sing it together, lining it out a phrase at a time.



**If you have a number of older children in the group, also sing the first and last stanzas of the song.**

- **Outreach zone: Reminders of God's hope** Visual reminders of God's hope made by the children can be shared with others much as Jeremiah shared God's hope in buying the field. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Message of Hope" and art supplies. Have extra copies for the children to make these reminders for friends or family members.

**Make lots of these reminders and place them in the pews of the sanctuary.**

- **Quiet zone: Meditation** Hope gives us courage to think about the future. In this zone, the children will slow down to think about how the world could be better in the future. Display the poster *Revival Field* at a height such that the children can look directly at it when seated. Display these directions with it:

- 1 Sit where you can look right at the poster.
- 2 The name of this poster is *Revival Field*. It is a field that is being brought back, revived, to a healthy place for plants to grow.
- 3 See the gate in the middle of the fence at the bottom? Imagine that you are walking through the gate into this field.
- 4 What might you see that would tell you that the land was getting better? How does that give you hope?
- 5 When you are ready to leave the field, give thanks to God for the hope you found here.



□ **Cooperation zone: Jeremiah relay**

This game is a fun way to recall the details of Jeremiah buying the field. Set three chairs side by side. On the first chair, place 17 silver coins; on the second, paper and pen. The relay is a race against the



clock, not against one another. The children form a single file line facing the chairs. At the signal to start, the first child runs to the first chair, picks up the coins, sits down, and counts the coins. Then this child gets up, puts the coins on the chair, and sits on the second chair and signs the bill of sale. Then this child gets up, leaves the bill of sale and the pen on the chair, and sits on the third chair and shouts, "God is with us in scary times." As soon as the first child gets up from the first chair, the next child in line goes to it. And on and on as each child sits on all three chairs. After you have explained the game, ask:

- **How much time do you think it will take to do this?**

Set a timer for the agreed-upon time.

**If you have a large group, set up a second set of three chairs. But continue to try to beat the clock, not the other line of children.**



**Gather** Play "Stand, O Stand Firm" (p. 12, *Music Section*; also #18 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle. Say:

The light of the candle reminds us that Jesus the Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be with us.

**Play** the song "May Peace Be with You/*Salamun Kullahee*" (p. 11, *Music Section*; also #24 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to sing the parts

they recognize. Then sing the chorus from "Fresh as the Morning" (pp. 8-9, *Music Section*; also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

God of hope, we live in your hope that you are always with us. Amen.

**Blessing** To each child say, "(*Child's name*), your hope is true. God is with you."



Where do the children in your group find signs of hope? How do you think they understand God's presence with them?

Did the children express interest in participating in any of the programs you told them about in the outreach zone? If so, how might they be involved?

**For the lament collage in the next session, collect newspaper and magazine pictures showing difficult times.**



# Jeremiah's Field of Hope

based on Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

**Practice the story ahead of time. Rehearse any movements, gestures, and use of props. Before you begin the story invite the children to pretend that the silver coins are the kind used in the time of Jeremiah.**

The people of Jerusalem were in trouble. Soldiers from Babylon had surrounded their city and were preparing to attack. Soon the city would be destroyed and the people captured. Everyone was very frightened. Everyone was very worried. It was the scariest time anyone could remember.

Jeremiah was locked up in the courtyard of the royal palace. The prophet was very sad. He had tried to warn the people that terrible trouble was coming, but no one would believe God's messages. King Zedekiah had said Jeremiah was frightening the people and had locked up the prophet.

Suddenly Jeremiah received a message from God.

"Jeremiah, listen carefully to what I have to say. Tomorrow your cousin Hanamel will come to you and ask you to buy the family's field. I want you to buy the field from your cousin."

Jeremiah was very surprised.

"Why on earth would God want me to buy a field?" The prophet wondered. "The army of Babylon is just about to destroy our land and take us away. I'm locked up here in the palace courtyard. The field will be useless to me and

I won't be able to farm it or build a house on it. What is God doing?"

Sure enough the very next day Jeremiah's cousin, Hanamel, arrived at the royal courtyard and asked Jeremiah to buy the family's field. Jeremiah followed God's instructions and bought the field. The price was 17 pieces of silver.

Jeremiah wanted to make sure that everything was done properly, so he asked some people to come and watch the field being sold. Seventeen pieces of silver were counted out and given to Hanamel. (*Invite the children to help you count out the coins.*) Jeremiah, Hanamel, and those watching signed the bill of sale. (*Have everyone sign the bill of sale.*) The bill of sale was folded up. (*Carefully fold it up.*) Sealed with hot wax. (*Light a candle and carefully tip it, so hot wax drips on the fold.*) And given to Jeremiah.

When this was done, Jeremiah received another message from God. It was a wonderful message of hope.

"Jeremiah, tell the people that I have not left them. Take this bill of sale, put it in a clay jar, and seal it shut so it will be kept safe. For I am the all powerful God and I promise you that one day the people will be allowed to come back to Jerusalem. They will buy and sell houses, farms, and fields. Then your family will want to prove that they own this land. I promise that this will come to pass."

Jeremiah shared God's message of hope with everyone who would listen. Even though it was a terrible time the people held onto God's message of hope.

"God's loving arms are wrapped around us," they would remind each other. "God is with us!"



# BIBLE DETECTIVES

Uncovering the story behind the story

Let's find out about  
Jeremiah

Jeremiah was the son of a priest. God came to Jeremiah in a vision and said, "Jeremiah, I am your Creator, and before you were born, I chose you to speak for me to the nations."



Then God's hand stretched out and touched Jeremiah's lips as a sign that God would put the words in Jeremiah's mouth.

Do you know what a prophet is? Look at the bottom of this page for more information.



What did God tell Jeremiah to say to the people?

The book of Jeremiah contains many of Jeremiah's messages. It would take way too long to look at all of them today, so here is a summary.

**You have turned away from God's ways. You steal, murder, tell lies, and worship other gods. You treat people unfairly and don't look after those who need help.**

**Change the way you are living and stop doing the things you are doing. Be fair in your treatment of everyone. Stop killing others. Stop worshipping other gods.**

Look at **Jeremiah 10:17–18** to see what Jeremiah said would happen to the people if they didn't change their ways. Summarize God's warning in the speech bubble below.

Do you know what a siege is? Look at the bottom of this page for more information.

How did the people respond to Jeremiah's warnings?

Look at **Jeremiah 20:1–2**.



What was happening in Jerusalem at the time of today's story?

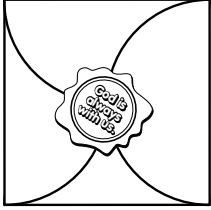
This wasn't the first time there had been conflict with the Babylonians. King Nebuchadnezzar had already invaded Judah once before; he spared the city, but had taken a number of leaders back to Babylon as hostages. Approximately ten years later the people of Judah rebelled against the Babylonians, so Nebuchadnezzar sent his army back and this time they had orders to destroy the city!

Jeremiah was imprisoned in the courtyard of the palace guards. The Babylonian army had surrounded the city and was preparing to attack.

## Some helpful definitions

**Prophet:** A prophet is a person who brings messages of hope and challenge from God to the people. Down through the ages, God has chosen men and women to speak and to live out God's messages. Jeremiah was a prophet.

**Siege:** A military operation in which enemy forces surround a city, cutting off essential supplies (such as food and water), with the aim of forcing those inside the city to surrender.



# Message of Hope

Sometimes when you are going through a scary or difficult time it can be encouraging to be reminded that God loves you and that God is near.

## Instructions

- Cut out the card and the promise seal.
- Use crayons and small decorations to brighten the inside of the card.
- Decorate the seal if you wish.
- Fold the card as shown.
- Glue the promise seal over the fold to keep the card closed.
- Decorate the outside of the card.

