

JEREMIAH WHO PLACED HIS MONEY WHERE HIS MOUTH WAS
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And I bought the field of Hananieel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver (Jer. 32: 9).

The prophet, Jeremiah, ministered during the most depressing days of Israel's history. The country was being overrun by Babylonian soldiers: the crops were ruined, and the land destroyed. Even Jehovah was annoyed by His obstinate people. The prophet had been imprisoned within the king's palace; the destruction of Jerusalem was inevitable; the market value of everything had reached rock bottom.

Jeremiah had a cousin, the son of Shallum. He was a shrewd businessman, and an expert at selling useless land. He owned a field near Anathoth, but realized it would soon be worthless. According to Hebrew law no property could be sold unless family members first had a chance to purchase it. Jeremiah had a prior claim on that field, and maybe his cousin had heard of the strange predictions being made by his relative. He carefully planned his movements, but was unaware God had warned Jeremiah what was being arranged.

So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver" (Jer. 32:8-9).

A Jew and His Fear ... Disturbing

The laws referring to the sale of Jewish property were very strict. Sales to foreigners were forbidden, and even when adverse circumstances impoverished the owner, no transaction could be completed unless the next of kin had been given an opportunity to make the purchase. Yet, in spite of anything sold, everything reverted to its original owner at the year of Jubilee. Evidently the cousin of Jeremiah had either bought or

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inherited a field near Anathoth, but his shrewd mind warned him it was urgently necessary to get rid of the property: it would soon be without value. The life of Jeremiah revolved around the promises of God. His cousin apparently had no faith in what might be. He lived only for the present and believed God helped those who helped themselves. The fact that he was more or less selling useless land to a member of his family was unimportant. He believed that if Jeremiah made a bad bargain, it was his own fault, for Anathoth would have been wiser not to purchase deteriorated property.

Many years later when the Lord sent a letter to His church at Philadelphia. He said. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). That command should never be forgotten. Even Esau sold his most cherished possession to Jacob because, for the moment, an appetizing meal seemed to be more attractive than gold (see Gen. 25:29-34). Some things are too valuable either to sell or exchange! Esau's stomach ran away with his brain.' It is disconcerting to remember that some of God's most promising servants failed in their mission, because they neglected to hold fast that which they already possessed. Whatever Judas might have gained from his being with the Lord

JEREMIAH WHO PLACED HIS MONEY WHERE HIS MOUTH WAS was ruined by His desire for money. It was claimed that Solomon was the wisest man in the world, but his wisdom was sacrificed on an altar of lust. It remains a profound mystery why that intelligent ruler should become so foolish. His collapse adds meaning to the words of Paul: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). It appeared that Jeremiah's cousin never considered these facts. He thought only of money and probably died a pauper.

Jeremiah and His Finances... Discerning

The imprisoned prophet awaited the arrival of his scheming cousin. Perhaps the visitor had heard of the things promised by God to Israel. but whether or not he believed those predictions is a matter of conjecture. Maybe the man saw an opportunity to test the sincerity of his relative. Would the prophet be willing to put his money where his mouth was? If Jeremiah truly believed what he was preaching. he might be tempted to make money by buying and later reselling the land. God had said: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (Jer. 32:15). Hanameel probably congratulated himself on being a very astute businessman.

"And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth. and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it. and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase. both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch . . . in the sight of Hanameel . . . in the presence of witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase. both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open: and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (Jer. 32:9-15).

The completion of the legal documents and their being placed in an earthen jar to protect them from dampness suggests that God's servant was fully aware that many years would pass before the fulfillment of his predictions. Jeremiah was completely convinced of the faithfulness of God. He could have used his money to purchase his freedom or to obtain favors to brighten his incarceration. Probably he was not even interested in such amenities. He was God's servant; his future lay in almighty hands.

Jehovah and His Faithfulness... Delivering

The thoughtfulness of Jeremiah not only guaranteed the safety of his investment, it provided evidence, should people forget or deny the transaction, that the word of the Lord was completely trustworthy. Conditions within Jerusalem were swiftly deteriorating. Advancing armies had cut the supply routes, and increasing hunger was destroying the confidence of the defenders of the city. Jeremiah had been temporarily released from confinement in the hope he would cease being a prophet of doom. He had repeated and even written his predictions of disaster,

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but the defiant monarch had burned the manuscript (see Jer. 36:22-26). The prophet was instructed by God to write another

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message using identical words. This angered the noblemen. and their demands for the destruction of the preacher persuaded the king to accede to their requests. "Then Zedekiah the king said. Behold he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you. Then took they Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon ... that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water. but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire" (Jer. 38:5-6).

Poor man! He was sitting in mud at the bottom of the well and had neither food nor water. His outlook was exceedingly bleak. He had every reason in the world to be depressed.

"Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian. one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon: the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin: Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king. saying. My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian. saying. Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon. before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury. and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and old rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison" (Jer. 38:7-13).

Sometimes God uses the most unlikely methods to perform miracles. Ebed-melech was a captive from Africa. His loyalty to the king must have been commendable, for he had access to the king's presence where he interceded for the prophet's release. Gently, carefully, Jeremiah was rescued and bathed. God sent a black man to help Jeremiah, an earthquake to help Paul and Silas, and a fish to help pay the taxes for the Lord and Simon Peter. Evidently. He has a great variety of servants capable of meeting the needs of His children

Many years elapsed before Jeremiah's predictions were fulfilled. The returning exiles from Babylon began to plow the land. rebuild the cities, and restore prosperity to the desolate country. Nothing more was said of the documents preserved in the earthen vessel, but the carefulness of Jeremiah in making his arrangements revealed him to be a man competent to fulfill his assignments. He was a gracious servant of Jehovah who cared for the reputation of his Master. He reminds one of an event which occurred during one of Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton's voyages to Antarctica. On one occasion the leader was Obligated to leave some of his men on an island, promising to return for them as soon as possible. Unfavorable conditions delayed that return, and it was only on his fourth attempt that Shackleton found a channel through the ice. Passing through that opening as quickly as possible, the explorer was delighted to find his men ready to board his vessel immediately. They escaped before the inlet was closed by ice. The famous explorer asked why his men were ready to embark at a moment's notice and was told: "Our leader rolled up his sleeping bag every morning and said, Get your things ready: the boss might come today." Jeremiah was a man of that caliber, and all Christians should emulate his example.

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I. Ivor Powell, Bible Cameos (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications 1985), 11-12.

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