Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15: Tell story of Jeremiah. God’s promise that normal economic activity, as prescribed by the Law, would continue. That is, land should be sold to relatives in order to keep it in the tribe.

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7. Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles in Babylon to settle down and pray for the country they live in — not to assimilate! Build houses, marry, have kids. 70 years.

So, it’s very complicated. There were three main powers: to the north of Israel, there was Assyria and Babylon. To the southwest, there was Egypt. Egypt tried to ally with Assyria to defeat Babylon, but failed. Of course, Israel was right in the thick of it all. Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the Babylonians, takes 10,000 Israelites to Babylon. Some prophets had said that this wouldn’t happen, but Jeremiah was very plain that it was going to happen, and that Israel should not resist. Soon after it did happen — in the very same year — he was still in Israel, and he sent a letter to the exiles in Babylonia; the letter is found in Jeremiah 29. He says the exile will last 70 years; they should put down roots.

Jeremiah also believes that God will bring the people back from exile in Babylon to live in the land. One way he expresses this in is Jeremiah 32, where he buys some property in Israel, which is essentially worthless, in order to keep it in the family, as was his right and his duty.

So there are two sides to Jeremiah: on the one hand, people should put down roots in Babylon. On the other had, they should put down roots in Israel. He knows that Judah will be restored (see chapter 33), but that, in the meantime, bad things will happen.

Jeremiah did not live to see the restoration of Israel. He did not go to Babylon. He was allowed to stay in Judah, at Mizpah. Eventually some of the Jews remaining there go to Egypt against Jeremiah’s desires, and he is forced to go, as well. He prophesizes that Babylon will fully defeat Egypt (as they did), and he spoke out against the idolatry of the Jews there. We don’t know how he died, but it is likely that the book of Jeremiah was compiled by his secretary and friend, Baruch, while they were in Egypt.

Jeremiah, like us, live in the space between a bad now and a future promise. Jeremiah knows (unlike us) that Israel was going to be in Babylonian captivity for a while. We don’t know if it will be 7,000 years, 700 years, 70 years, 7 years, or 7 minutes until the world’s end. On the one hand, we may be mocked for having hope for a better future. On the other hand, we might be criticized for caring about the world we live in and that our children will inherit. We have been reading parables and stories about the right use of our money and resources — like making friends with our money, Lazarus and Dives, the generosity of Jesus towards those with skin diseases (and their lack of thankfulness). Here are some lessons we should learn — somewhat mixed.

Messages, some a bit mixed:

* It’s ok to engage in the economic life of a community, lived in accordance with law and generosity.
* We should care for the earth that we live in. Check out 350.org and Bill McKibben’s writings.
* God will take care of us even in our economic downturns, especially if we care for one another.
* We should be content with “enough” and pursue godliness above wealth.
* We ignore those in need to our very great peril. There are always people in great need around us.
* We shouldn’t be too surprised if we are confused; it is confusing! What are ways we can avoid Jeremiah’s depression?

Stories.

* Mennonite Relief Sale
* Jane’s visitors
* Guy who needed gas last night; Rick Neevel’s generosity.
* Bill McKibben.