In Jeremiah 32, an ambiguous prophet buys a piece of land in the ambiguous territory of Benjamin. Crucial for the development of the book of Jeremiah was group conflict in Judean society resulting from Babylonian hegemony. A ‘Jeremianic debate’ took place in which different groups of Judeans developed their identity in interplay with the Jeremianic tradition. Traces of these struggles for identity can be found in chapter 32, and such struggles continue to take place in the reception history of the text.

In this dissertation, Janneke Stegeman analyzes constructions of group identity in Jeremiah 32 and its reception history, making visible the layered character of Jeremiah 32 and giving insight into the processes shaping the ongoing tradition. Stegeman unites traditional exegesis – taking its point of departure in the information offered by the text itself, first from a synchronic and then from a diachronic perspective – with a postcolonial approach that takes into account the power negotiations taking place in the interpretative tradition. Stegeman shows that this renewing approach also has value for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: contemporary readings in this context are part of her study. Here too, careful analysis of how group identity is constructed in interaction with the tradition can open up fixed identifications and create space for transformation.

Stegeman argues for an ethical approach of the Jeremianic tradition, not in the sense that ethical principles need to be or can always be derived from the text, but, rather, that becoming part of this diverse tradition requires a sensitivity to ethical questions. From the reader, this requires vulnerability, openness and the willingness to accept that there is no absolute truth or original text to take refuge in.