

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 30:1-3, 18-22
Lesson Title: A Vision of the Future

Introduction

Jeremiah was called by God as a prophet when he was quiet young, possibly around twenty. He was “the son of Hilkiah” who was an unknown country priest that bore little or no significance (Jeremiah 1:1). The “Hilkiah” who was Jeremiah’s father was not the Hilkiah who found the scroll in the days of Josiah the King. Jeremiah lived in “Anathoth” some three miles northeast of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1:1). That was about an hour’s walk from where he would preach and minister.

The name “Jeremiah” means “God hurls or throws.” For the most part Jeremiah lived and ministered with the feeling and burden that God had “hurled” him down into this sea of spiritual confusion and sin. Like Jesus, Jeremiah faced persecution and rejection from his own townspeople and relatives because of the message he preached (Jeremiah 11: 11-21: 12:6).

Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of five kings, three of whom are listed in Jeremiah 1:3. He began his public ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah of Judah and prophesied for more than forty years (Jeremiah 1:2-3). Judgment was the central theme of Jeremiah’s preaching. In the forty years preceding Judah’s exile to Babylon, Jeremiah was a lone voice of coming judgment. The nation was guilty of idolatry and had lost all fear of God and His holy law (Jeremiah 16:11-13).

While dominated by the coming judgment and captivity of God’s people in Babylon, Jeremiah’s preaching was not without hope. He prophesied that the days of captivity would eventually come to an end (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). He also prophesied that Babylon, the instrument of judgment, would ultimately be destroyed. Jeremiah saw beyond the judgment of God to the time when He would enter into a new relationship with Israel. God would restore Israel to the homeland and His people.

Announcing the Promise for the Future (Jeremiah 30:1-3)

The content of Jeremiah’s prophecy does not follow a chronological order. It seems the book is arranged by content subject. That being stated, we cannot be sure when Jeremiah 30 was written in regard to the other portions. It does however most likely to have been written just prior to the Babylonian captivity.

Verse 1-2

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.”

Prior to the Babylonian captivity, Judah’s religious and political leaders were all corrupt. The prophets no longer proclaimed the words of God. The political leaders of the day no longer defended the cause of justice. Jeremiah was not at all certain that if he walked Jerusalem’s streets, he’d find even one righteous, God-fearing person. All these spiritual factors in Jeremiah’s life make the words “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD” so important. It is that singular factor that meant Jeremiah would be more than just another man and another prophet. Still today, hearing from the Lord through His written word is essential to hope.

There is more in the words “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying” than any of us can imagine. Sometimes the “word of the Lord” came to Jeremiah personally for his own life (Jeremiah 16:1-2). But in most cases when the “word of the Lord” came it was a message God intended the prophet to deliver to His people.

When the “word” of God came to a man in the Old Testament, it meant more than a man was just sitting around thinking about God. The word “came” means there was an active impulse inside of Jeremiah that was sent by God. The “word” that “comes” to us “from the LORD” is what makes all the difference in life. As believers, we are so blessed to have the written word of God (Psalm 119:140; Matthew 4:4). There is nothing about Jeremiah or any of us that will make a difference in the world in which we live if we fail to hear and heed God’s Word.

In Jeremiah 30:1, Jeremiah receives an authoritative “word” or utterance from the LORD.” “LORD” is “Jehovah,” the “self-existing one.” The name “Jehovah” speaks of God’s self-existence, eternity, and unchangeableness. That may partially explain why “LORD” or “Jehovah” was Jeremiah’s favorite name for God. In spite of all that Israel had done to deserve judgment and abandonment by God, the “LORD” (Jehovah) continued to love her and claim her as His own.

God instructed Jeremiah to “Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.” The “book” is a scroll. The purpose of writing what God had said to Jeremiah was so the nation would have a permanent record of the promises God was giving to His people. Although King Jehoiakim tried to destroy God’s words to Jeremiah, the word survived (Jeremiah 36)!

Verse 3

“For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.”

The theme of God’s “words” to Jeremiah are stated in this verse. The promise is that the Lord “will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah...” “Israel” (the Northern Kingdom) and “Judah” (the Southern Kingdom) will one day come back as a united people. Some attempt to spiritualize this promise or relate it to the return of the people to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. This promise goes much deeper and further. This is a promise of a literal return of both Israel and Judah to literally “possess” the land promised to their ancestors (Genesis 13:14-15; 17:8). God said “they shall possess it.” The word “possess” means “seize, take possession of.” The promise of a “return to the land” here has in view a final regathering of God’s people to the Promised Land which has not yet occurred. This promised return is not simply the return from Babylon, but the future millennial kingdom. That is the promise of God and the heart of Jeremiah’s message in Jeremiah 30:1-3.

Amplifying the Promise for the Future (Jeremiah 30:18-22)

Jeremiah 30:4-17 (not in our lesson text) includes reasons for *pessimism* and *optimism*. Because sin and disobedience must be punished there was no way for Judah and Israel to escape the coming captivity. The Babylonian captivity had begun and any competent physician would have considered the condition hopeless (Jeremiah 30:12-13). There was every reason for the nation to be *pessimistic*. But there is ample reason for *optimism* in these verses. There is hope. The Lord said, “*Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it*” (Jeremiah 30:7). God specializes in the impossible and the miraculous. It is God Himself who will bring His children home and at a prescribed time in the future restore the land (Jeremiah 30:8).

Verse 18

“Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof.”

“Thus saith the LORD,” or “again God spoke to Jeremiah” and said, “Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents.” That means “God will turn things around” for Jacob. What God had promised to Abraham and his descendants through Jacob and his sons will come to pass. If it didn’t it would destroy God’s honor. As believers we have a similar promise, “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6).

“Jacob’s tents” is a phrase that refers to the tribes of Israel, or Jacob’s sons. In Numbers 24 when Balaam attempted to curse Israel his words came out as a blessing over Israel. In Numbers 24:5-6, Balaam refers to “*Jacob’s tents*” and “*Jacob’s tabernacles*” or encampments. As in our text in Jeremiah 30:18, “*Jacob’s tents*” refers to his sons or the twelve tribes of Israel.

“*Jacob’s tents*” also speak of pilgrimage. People who are not settled are often referred to by the use of the word “*tents*.” In Hebrews 11:9, speaking of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Bible says, “*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.*” The situation for God’s people during the Babylonian Captivity was that they were outside the Promised Land. They were not home but Jeremiah prophesies that God “will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents.” They will one day return home.

The situation today for the Jewish people is that they are still scattered and away from their homeland. While some Jews are returning to the Promised Land, their return is not a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophesy. It may be a start in that direction or a picture of what is yet to come, but rest assured that what Jeremiah is promising in this text will literally take place in the not so distant future.

God will have “mercy” on Jacob’s descendants and they will one day move out of their “tents” or their pilgrim identity and their “dwellingplaces” will be built “upon her own heap.” The word “heap” means “mound.” It is an architect’s word referring to building a structure on the ruins of an old city or town. In the ancient Near East, when a city was destroyed, a new city would be built up the rubble of the old. God is promising that He will build a new Jerusalem, a new city for Jacob’s descendants upon the ruins of the old city.

“And the palace shall remain after the manner thereof” means the city of Jerusalem will be splendid and glorious again. Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and its splendor and glory will rival that of the days of David and Solomon. In that rebuilding will be “the palace.” The word “palace” means “a citadel, a fortress.” It is referring a place for king to abide. The language sounds like there is a king coming!

Verse 19

“And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.”

The future promise for Israel involves more than buildings. “Out of them” or “out of the rebuilt city and the houses and buildings” will come “thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry.” What a blessed day when the sighs and groans of oppression will give way to “thanksgiving” and joyful voices.

“Multiply” and “they shall not be few” means the population will increase. God said, “I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small” means God will give honor to the nation. In the time of David and Solomon the nation of Israel reached her peak. Other nations respected Israel but sin soon changed that reality.

Note: Today, Israel is hated by almost every nation on earth. Her allies are few and decreasing every day. But the promise of God is that He will “glorify them, and they shall not be small.” The days of her contempt will soon be over. In the future God’s people will come out of their tents and be moved into a city.

Verse 20

“Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them.”

God promises that the birth and presence of “children” will “be as aforetime” or as was formerly. “Children” is always a sign of God’s blessing whether in a nation, a community, a home, or a church. This corresponds with Isaiah’s prophecy, “Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 54:1).

An “established congregation” refers to the people be secure, fixed, and stable. Anyone who looks at the nation of Israel today can see that neither of these promises have yet been fulfilled. Furthermore, God has not yet “punished” those who “oppress them.” The word “punish” means “attend to, reckon, and visit.” Anti-Semitism is on the rise in Europe and most other countries around the world. God has not yet “punished” or destroyed the enemies of His people but He will very soon. Politicians may scoff and betray God’s people but God will “punish” all who do. Historians may attempt to rewrite history and deny the oppression of God’s people but the truth is settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89). Comedians may joke and make fun of Israel but remember, God will have the last laugh (Psalm 2:4).

Verse 21

“And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD.”

Jeremiah has described the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the joy and gladness that will fill the place in the future. He has also given hope that the city will be occupied with children and the enemies that formerly oppressed will be gone. Now, he talks about the leadership that will govern the renewed city.

The restored city of God is promise “nobles” and a “governor” who will not be a foreigner. Their future leader would be one of their own, and Israelite. That is what Israel law required of their king (Deuteronomy 17:15). That’s the meaning of the words, “Their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.” Israel has a long history of foreign rulers from the Babylonians to the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and even the Arabs.

This is a Messianic promise. How do we know that? It is clear from how God describes this promised coming leader. “I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me...” The language used here is a reminder that no one is free to “approach” or “draw near” and enter God’s presence without the fear of death. The words “draw near” and “approach” are also priestly words. This new leader or new king over the restored city and people of God will function in the role of priest and king. That can be none other than Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:6-10).

Verse 22

“And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

The result of the coming of God’s leader will be the restoration of the covenant relationship between God and His people. The wording suggests that God is going to draw Israel into a renewed relationship with Him. That is confirmed in the words “ye shall be” and “I will be.” Also, when God said, “I will be your God” He is saying, “I am going to sustain your faith in me.” God is promising that Israel is going to trust in God to sustain them and take care of them and He is going to see to it that they do. God is going to be faithful to them and He is going to cause them to be faithful to Him. What a glorious promise! Jeremiah will describe this future reality in more detail in Jeremiah 31.

Conclusion

Some believe the promises in Jeremiah 30:1-24 were fulfilled when the captives returned from Babylon and that the promises in Jeremiah 30:1-24 cannot be yet future. There are many problems with that interpretation. First, the people didn’t remain faithful to God after their return from captivity. Second, the palace wasn’t built. And third, no prince ruled in Jerusalem and the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were not reunited.

Others believe the prophecy in Jeremiah 30:1-24 looked beyond the days of Ezra and Nehemiah to the first coming of Messiah. They believe the promises are being fulfilled today in the church. Christ is the Messiah. Christ is seated on the heavenly throne at the right hand of God and Christ is building His city by saving sinners and building His church. People who are a part of the church are increasing or multiplying and they are full of joy. Those who interpret Jeremiah 30:1-24 in that manner are spiritualizing the text and that is not good biblical exposition.

The promises given in Jeremiah 30:1-24 are given to a specific people, Jacob and his descendants. The church is never called Jacob, Judah, or Israel. The rebuilding of the city and the ruling of the king promised is here on earth, not in heaven. What Jeremiah 30:1-24 promises and describes is a glorious future for the nation of Israel and a period of time yet in the future known as the millennial reign of Jesus Christ described in Revelation 20.

For believers today the promises of Jeremiah 30:1-24 are a reminder of several important truths. First, God keeps His promises to Israel and to His church. The Apostle Paul said, *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”* (Titus 1:2). Speaking of Abraham, Paul writes, *“And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Romans 4:21). Second, we as God’s people are moving toward the conclusion of history. Everything happening today in the church and with the Jewish people is fulfillment of prophecy and God’s promises and should excite us to press on toward the goal of being with Christ forever. Time is moving toward eternity for God’s people! Third, the church is not Israel but her future is tied to Israel’s future. Again, the Apostle Paul said, *“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness”* (Romans 11:11-12). Fourth, life is meaningful, it has purpose. That should encourage us to live for Christ, serve him, and tell others who are not prepared for the coming kingdom to repent of unbelief and trust Christ as their Savior.

Israel’s future is connected with our future. And that is a great comfort to every child of God, Jew or Gentile.

Amen.