

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
September 28, 2014

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 33:1-11
Lesson Title: Improbable Possibilities

Introduction

Jeremiah 33 is the last chapter in the section of this prophecy known as “the book of consolation” (Jeremiah 30-33). These chapters were probably composed after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah 30 began with a promise from God to Jeremiah that He would “...bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents” (Jeremiah 30:18). Jeremiah 32 ends with a promise that God would “...cause their captivity to return” (Jeremiah 32:44). Chapter 33 opens with another word from the Lord. Although Jeremiah knew these promises there was nothing visible or even on the horizon to cause Jeremiah to believe these things would happen other than faith.

Illus. Everyone likes to hear stories of people who faced hardship and difficulty and yet survived. In 1876, Milton Hershey, a young rural farm boy from a Mennonite community in Pennsylvania moved to Philadelphia to start is first business. He was financially supported by his mother's family but his business survived for only six years, before going bankrupt in 1882. Milton then traveled to Denver, New Orleans, and Chicago looking for new opportunities. He settled in New York City and starting a second business which lasted only 3 years, closing in 1886. After these failure, Hershey returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1887 where he established The Lancaster Carmel Company. It was this return and recovery that laid the foundation for what we known today as The Hershey Chocolate Company.

While the world is filled with stories of people who had it all, lost it all, and then regained their fortunes, none is as great as the story of the nation of Israel. Surely Israel had everything anyone could want. They were chosen by God, given a covenant of promise and a land called Canaan. Because of sin and disobedience they lost the privileges and blessings God had promised them. While some must have believed Israel’s days were over, God promised them He would restore them to the land and fulfill His promises to them. That’s the story of Jeremiah 33.

Improbable Possibilities and Prayer (Jeremiah 33:1-3)

Verse 1-2

“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name;”

The prophet Jeremiah is still a prisoner in Jerusalem when “the LORD” speaks to him “the second time.” Although the word from the Lord speaks of restoration in the future, judgment has not yet been experienced when Jeremiah receives this “second” word from God.

This “second” message from God to Jeremiah is given while he is confined “in the court of the prison.” This message was sent to answer some of Jeremiah’s lingering questions concerning the coming captivity. Although Jeremiah had been obedient to God in chapter 32 in purchasing the field in Anathoth, he was human and had some doubts about why the captivity had to be.

When you live by faith you are going to have moments of doubt. Jeremiah had his and so will you. The Lord had previously asked Jeremiah, “*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*” Knowing the questions and doubts Jeremiah must have been experiencing, God comes to Jeremiah in this “second” message and identifies Himself as “the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name.” God is the “maker” or Creator of all things. Everything that is was “formed” by the hand of God. The word “formed” means “designed with a pre-determined purpose.”

Not only did God want Jeremiah to know He was the One who “designed” everything, He wanted him to know He “established it.” “Established” means “God securely determined or provided for the completion of what He started.” He is “the LORD.” He is “Jehovah, the self-existing One.”

Verse 3

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

God invites Jeremiah to “call” unto Him, or pray and ask Him about the questions and doubts he has. God promises He “will answer” him and will also “show” him “great and mighty things” which Jeremiah doesn’t “know.” “Call” means “to cry out, proclaim, or summons.” This is more than just vocal exercise or a string of words directed to God. Jeremiah had already prayed in Jeremiah 32:16, but there are things he wants to know and God is able and willing to tell him.

“Me” of course refers to God. Who else but the Creator God is able to tell us things we need to know about the future. God told Jeremiah, “I will answer thee.” What consolation! There are so many people who have a conflict of

interest when it comes to helping us or answering our questions and doubts. Not God! He knows exactly how to answer our prayers. The word “answer” is more than a “hello” or “I hear you.” The word conveys the meaning of “responding as a witness” or “making the necessary arrangements.” “Great and mighty things” refers to the numerous things about the future that are presently inaccessible to Jeremiah. There are some things that can only be known when God answers prayer.

What a powerful word to Jeremiah. Jeremiah knows all the promises God has made concerning Israel’s future, but remember, he’s in prison. Who’s going to make all the arrangements? Who’s going to make all this happen? The answer is “the LORD!”

Jeremiah had been called by God to prophesy. Now God calls him to pray. The message of Jerusalem’s downfall and captivity had taken a toll upon this faithful prophet of God. What an encouragement these words must have been for the prophet to know God wants to speak with him personally, one on one about the days ahead.

Are there things you desire to know? If so, remember that prayer is always connected with knowledge. Like Jeremiah, believers have that same opportunity and invitation to pray (Matthew 7:7; John 14:12-14; Ephesians 3:20-21; James 4:2-3). God is not indifferent to our cries and our prayers. God does not ignore us when we pray.

Improbable Possibilities and Punishment (Jeremiah 33:4-5)

Verse 4-5

“For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city.”

“For thus saith the LORD” begins the answer to Jeremiah’s prayer. God is about to “show” Jeremiah what is happening in the nations. Sadly, it is a revelation of judgment. The “houses” of the common people and the “houses of the kings of Judah” will be torn down to make “mounts” or mounds of defense against the invading army. The lumber from their homes was torn down and piled up against the gates to try to prevent the enemy from breaking through the walls.

“They” referring to the Jews will “fight with the Chaldeans” and the result will be the piling up of “the dead bodies of men” who have died because of God’s judgment. Since the Jews couldn’t take the “dead bodies” outside the wall for

burial, the bodies were literally piling up on the inside of the city walls. No matter what measures the people took to try to defend themselves or survive, they would be “slain” because God was bringing judgment. Because of Israel’s sin, God had “hidden His face from this city.” As awful as the situation was God was just in refusing to withhold judgment. God must judge sin and the city of Jerusalem was a sinful city.

The story of history is that of God judging nations and punishing sin. And any people or nation who thinks they have escaped the judgment of God is deceiving themselves. The prophet Daniel said, *“Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king’s matter”* (Daniel 2:20-23)

Improbable Possibilities and Promises (Jeremiah 33:6-8)

Verse 6-8

“Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.”

“Behold” means “take another look, or consider this.” The same God who said He had hidden his face from Jerusalem is the same God who now promises restoration and healing. God states His promise to restore in seven “I wills.”

1) I will bring health-Jeremiah had already prophesied that Israel would be in captivity for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). When that time is up, God will heal them and bring them “health.” The word “health” means “restore to soundness.”

2) I will cure them-The word “cure” in this context is set against the incurable nature of their sin. Jeremiah’s prophesy and warning along with the prophet Isaiah had done virtually nothing to result in Israel’s repentance. But the promise is that God Himself will “cure them.” He will restore them to soundness.

3) I will reveal the abundance of peace and truth-God is promising that He will do a healing work on the inside of the people. This healing will not be from a physician's salve or a miracle drug, but rather from "peace and truth." There is going to come a calm within God's people that results from right relationship with the Lord. That relationship is based on "truth." "Truth" is "the faithfulness and reliability of God Himself."

4) I will cause the captivity of Judah and Israel to return-As Jeremiah hears these words, much of the nation of Judah and Israel are long gone into captivity. There are only a few people left in the city of Jerusalem. Yet God promises a full restoration. God says, "They will return."

5) I will build them as at the first-This promise has not yet taken place. Although God's people returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity they have not returned "as at the first." Much has been regained and restored but not like it originally was. Thank God that day is yet future but is sure to come!

6) I will cleanse them from all their iniquity-When the people return they will be ceremonially clean. That means they will be able to minister before the Lord. Sin and disobedience defiles and rendered the individual unclean. Thank God the day is coming when the spiritual diseases will no longer hinder the people of God from true ministry.

7) I will pardon all their iniquity-The greatness of God's mercy is indicated here in the greatness of the sin He forgives. Forgiveness is one of the gracious acts of God. The Holy Spirit uses three separate words to describe the seriousness of Israel's sin which led to their captivity. First, "iniquity." The word "iniquity" means "twisted, or bent." Second, "sinned" means "to miss the mark." Third, "transgressed" means "to rebel."

Each of these three words are synonymous yet they reveal the different way sin operates. Things may seem straight to us but God says they are twisted or bent. Sometimes we feel like our life is right on target and yet we've totally missed the mark. We sometimes think what we're doing is not that serious while all the time it is rebellion in the sight of God. So, the greatness of Israel's sin is placed against the greatness of God's restoration and forgiveness.

God is promising Jeremiah that He will heal, cure, rebuild, cleanse, pardon, and forgive the sins of Israel. God will do that because He has properly punished their sin by seventy years of captivity in Babylon. Sin cannot be overlooked. It must be dealt with properly. And that is what God did through the seventy years of captivity.

How does God heal and cleanse the sin of the nation? The prophet Isaiah said, *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:*

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). The prophet Zechariah declared, “...and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10). When Israel looks by faith upon the Messiah, forgiveness of sin will come. Ultimate healing and cleansing of sin will come through the Messiah, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Improbable Possibilities and Praise (Jeremiah 33:9-11)

Verse 9

“And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.”

“It” is a reference to Jerusalem. When God’s people accept Messiah and turn to Him for forgiveness of sin, Jerusalem will have “a name of joy.” She will be “a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth.” That certainly is not the case today because Israel as a nation has not yet accepted Messiah. This promise is yet future, but the day is coming when all the nations will “fear and tremble” when they hear how good God is to Israel and how He has blessed her and given her “prosperity.” The word “prosperity” means “completeness, safety, soundness.”

Verse 10

Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast,”

“Again” is a promise of restoration. Jerusalem, because of her sin and rebellion against God was a place that was “desolate” empty and literal wasteland. So bad were the results her sin that she was “without man” and “without beast.” Neither a man nor an animal could live there. The desolation was terrible. The “streets” were barren and empty.

Verse 11

“The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.”

The days are coming when the desolate city of Jerusalem would once again hear the “voice of joy, and the voice of gladness.” Weddings and celebrations would once again fill the streets. Shouts of “Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good” will echo throughout the streets. The “sacrifice of praise” will again be brought “into the house of the LORD.”

As stated in previous lessons in Jeremiah, “the LORD of hosts” is literally “Lord of the armies.” Although the armies of the Babylonians are surrounding the city of Jerusalem, “the LORD of armies” will ultimately win the fight and be gloriously praised throughout all eternity.

Conclusion

The book of consolation in Jeremiah 30-33 ends where it began, with a promise of restoration. No doubt it seemed improbable and even impossible to Jeremiah but it will come. Looking at the world today it may at times seem impossible to us but restoration will come for Israel. These days promised have not yet occurred for Israel but they will in the future when Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign.

As believers, we have a foretaste of this new life in our relationship with Jesus Christ. According to John 10:10, we who are saved by grace have “*abundant life*” now. Although we have “abundant life” now, according to the Apostle Paul, the best is yet to come! Writing to the Ephesians Paul said, “*In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory*” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Like the people of Jerusalem, maybe you are starring some difficulty or disappointment in the face today. Maybe your life is surrounded by enemies to powerful for you to overcome. Through Jeremiah’s words remember you can rely on the power and mercy of Almighty God. By faith, look beyond the circumstances of the present into the glorious promises for the future. Like Jeremiah, call unto the Lord, and God will show you great and mighty things!

Amen.