

Born to Win

Jeremiah #26

by Ronald L. Dart

It must be a truly *awful* thing when a city falls. What happened to Baghdad when the Americans took it was *nothing* compared to what happened in the ancient world when a city fell at the end of a siege. Baghdad was bad enough, but the armies of old fought *hand-to-hand*, and when they finally breached the wall of the city—well, sometimes those sieges went on for a year or two years. There had been all kinds of bloodletting on both sides, especially of people in the inside of the city hitting on the people outside, as well. So when they finally breached the wall, there was no holding them back until the bloodlust had finally been satisfied—till they were worn out, essentially, they killed people.

There's a scene in *Saving Private Ryan* that comes to mind (*Saving Private Ryan*, the movie, which is probably the best war movie of all time). I'm not talking so much about the scene on the beach at the beginning of the movie. That was *truly* one of the most dramatic and, they say, probably the most realistic scene of what combat like that is like that's ever been shot in a movie. If you saw it, you know what awful carnage the Germans on the heights above were wreaking on the invading troops below. They were raining down machine-gun fire, mortar fire, artillery on these people. It was like hail in a hailstorm. Men died in their *thousands* on that beach.

That's not the scene. The scene is later when, as the men have finally fought through, made their way up, and have broken up to the top of the hill, *behind* the German pillboxes. The Germans—who moments before had been killing Americans with abandon and, apparently, with glee—threw down their arms and held up their hands and tried to surrender. The American troops cut them down where they stood. How can you kill hundreds, thousands of men and then throw up your hands when your position is breached and say, "I give up. I quit"? Yeah, surrendering man should not be killed, but there is a *time* to surrender, and when that time is past you might as well fight *to the end*.

In a way, this is the message Jeremiah had tried to give to Israel for a very long time. His warning was: if you surrender *now*, you will live. If you defend this city, you will die and the Chaldeans will burn *the city* and burn *you* with fire. Now, that's a very straightforward message that he's giving to them. There isn't very much in the Book of Jeremiah about the *actual* fall of the city, but there is a book about the *aftermath*—it's called Lamentations. And it's very hard for me to describe the Book of Lamentations to you. It's tempting to call it poetry, but that would probably call the wrong image to your mind. It is a *kind* of poetry—it is a song of lamentation. Perhaps it could be done as an oratorio with a very *heavy* type of music to go with it.

And for all of that, it's much more *powerful* than a simple, factual account could ever have been. Jeremiah doesn't give us statistics—he doesn't tell us the number of dead, he doesn't mention just that, "Well, there was cannibalism in the city before it finally fell." No, it's different from that. The way in which he tells the story is designed to evoke in our minds a sensitivity, a feeling, an emotional response to what has happened. When I read the Lamentations of Jeremiah, I am reminded so *strongly* of the Holocaust of our own era of history. I want to read sections of Lamentations to you and comment on it, but I want you to listen not just to the *words*—I want you to listen to the *feelings* of Jeremiah as he laments what has happened to Jerusalem, the Golden City. Lamentations, chapter one, verse one.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

- ¹ How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!
- ² She weeps sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she has none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

You know, when I think back on what happened in Germany and Poland before World War II, I expect few things affected the Jews as much as the *betrayal* of their neighbors and of people who thought they had friends. They *found* a few friends during the Holocaust, but there weren't very many—because it was *worth your life* to befriend a Jew, to hide a Jew, to protect a Jew. We know the stories have been told again and again and again, and there's an irony in all of this because God speaks about, "among all her lovers she finds no one to comfort her", and it's almost like a left-handed thing to Israel—that Israel had played the harlot. Instead of being a faithful wife she had lovers and lovers and lovers and lovers and *none of them* were there for her when the chips were really down. Jeremiah continues in verse three:

Lamentations 1

AKJV

- ³ Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwells among the heathen, she finds no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

You know, in ancient times (and often in even more recent times) they would use the name of the country as a appellation for the king. They would call, for example, the King of England—he would be referred to as "England", the king of France as "France". And so the king of Judah is "Judah". Judah is going into captivity. All *his* persecutors overtook him between the straits. It seems to be a reference to Kings Zedekiah, who fled with his retinue. And this is one of the really *ironic* stories of Jeremiah—that this man who wanted to fight and wanted to fight and wanted to fight, who heard all the warnings Jeremiah had to give them about, "Look, if you're going to surrender, do it now. If you let them besiege this city—if you hold them off and hold them off and hold them off until this wall is breached and the city falls, there's going to be hell to pay. The whole city is going to burn with fire. People going to be dying in their thousands." And King Zedekiah says, "No, no, no! We are going to *resist* the Babylonians." And when the city fell, where was Zedekiah? He escaped through a secret passageway and *ran for his life*. But his persecutors overtook him and his retinue in the straits. And they actually killed his sons in front of his eyes and made him watch while he died, and then they put out his eyes and took him to Babylon. So the last thing he ever saw was the death of his sons. It was a hard, hard time. Jeremiah continues in Lamentations 1, verse four:

Lamentations 1

AKJV

- ⁴ The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: [...]

Every road leading to Jerusalem was desolate. There's nobody in them. You'd come around Passover season or festival season, normally, they would be *thronged* with people. Now? No one.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

- ⁴ [...] all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.
- ⁵ Her adversaries are the chief, [...]

She's got the strongest, toughest people against her.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

⁵ [...] her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Now, I want to throw in a caution here. I'm doing so because I compare, in some ways, what has happened here to the Holocaust. Judah went into captivity because she had sinned. Don't *ever* make the mistake of assuming that you are better than she was and, therefore, nothing like this could ever happen to you. That is one of the most *stupid* things you could ever do. Jesus told one of the crowds around him one day, "Don't make the mistake of assuming that group of people who were making sacrifices, when along came their enemies and mingled their blood with their own sacrifices—killed them."

Luke 13

AKJV

² [...] Suppose you that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

³ I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

⁴ Or those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think you that they were sinners above all men that dwelled in Jerusalem?

⁵ I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

And so the caution here is: don't sit here and think, "Oh well, those *Jews* deserved what they got." You do, too. *All* the prophets go on to speak of the punishment of the people who *punished* the Jews. Yeah, the Jews were sinners. Yes, the Jews brought some of this on themselves. But at the same time, the people who punished them were just as wicked as the Jews and they also *got it* in the end. Lamentations 1, verse six:

Lamentations 1

AKJV

⁶ And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, [...]

Their bones are showing everywhere; they're dying off.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

⁶ and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

⁷ Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, [...]

Here they are, sitting around in the desolate city—nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and remembering how *good* she had it. She remembered that:

Lamentations 1

AKJV

⁷ [...] when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.

⁸ Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: [...]

They used to honor her. Now, they *hate* her.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

⁸ [...] yes, she sighs, and turns backward.

How do we come to this? Well, it isn't that Judah was worse than anybody else. It was that God had *higher expectations* of Judah than he did of anybody else. He *cared* about them and, therefore, this had to be dealt with.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

¹³ For these things I weep; [...]

Jeremiah now shifted his perspective, as though he is speaking for the city.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

¹⁶ For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.

¹⁷ Zion spreads forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her [...]

Zion speaks.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

¹⁸ The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: [...]

Oh, it is *so late*. It is *always so late* when we come to the realization that, "Yeah, God was right, after all. I *did* do wrong. I *did* rebel against his commandment. *Now* look where I am." And how much better is it to figure that out *early*.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

¹⁹ I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and my elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls.

They forgot about us. The priests, the leaders, the preachers, they *all* forgot about the rest of us, trying to feed their *own bellies*. Ahh, it's just happened; I am distressed. Verse 21:

Lamentations 1

AKJV

²¹ They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all my enemies have heard of my

trouble; they are glad that you have done it: you will bring the day that you have called, and they shall be like to me.

Oh yeah, it's true. All those people who stood around and watched Jerusalem fall and rejoiced over it, all of them that clapped their hands, all of them that thought, "Ah, well, they're finally getting what *they* had coming." They're day is coming, and they're going to be *just like me*. How did they know that? Well, as a matter of fact, Jeremiah had told them *time and again*. Oh yeah, it's going to happen. But understand this: those nations that come upon you, those nations to turn against you, their day also will come.

Lamentations 1

AKJV

²² Let all their wickedness come before you; and do to them, as you have done to me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

If you're wondering why I'm telling you all this—why we're going through Lamentations (apart from the fact that it's *here* and we need to deal with it)—it is because the *whole world* is in rebellion against God, and each of us in our turn are going to have to come face-to-face with *precisely* what Judah came face-to-face with: that we have ignored God, we've ignored his commandments, we've stomped all over his laws, and *sooner or later* we're going to have to pay the piper. And this is what it's like when it finally comes down around your ears. Lamentations 2, verse five:

Lamentations 2

AKJV

⁵ The LORD was as an enemy: he has swallowed up Israel, he has swallowed up all her palaces: he has destroyed his strong holds, and has increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

⁶ And he has violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he has destroyed his places of the assembly: [...]

He just swept it away. It's interesting he calls it a tabernacle. It *was* a temple.

Lamentations 2

AKJV

⁶ [...] the LORD has caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and has despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.

All the leadership—the king; what amounted to, really, the Senate and the House of Representatives, the *whole thing*. God said, "I am finished with these people." what thing shall I take first thirteen to witness for the two What shall I liken you old daughter of Jerusalem what shall I like in you that I may comfort you a daughter of Zion for your breach is as wide as the ocean who can patch it up your profits have seen vain. And foolish things for you they have not discovered your iniquity to turn away your captivity but have seen for you false burdens and they brought you to the place where you're going to have banishment.

I want to stop here just for a moment so we understand what he is saying to these people. If all they had had was Jeremiah; If *all* the prophets, let's say, had been saying the same thing Jeremiah had said; if the people had been getting a consistent message from all sides of those who claim to speak for God there was a half a chance they might have repented. But they had other prophets besides Jeremiah who were telling them something *entirely different*: "You're going to have peace. Don't worry about that. Don't

worry about the Law of God.” And there was a *dismissive* attitude in certain aspects of the priests and the prophets of Jerusalem, to the extent that it *just didn’t matter* whether they really obey God or not.

Now, here we are in the 21st century, looking around us in our country today and thinking about what’s going on. All is well; we are prosperous. I mean, we couldn’t be any wealthier; there doesn’t seem to be any way. We complain, moan, and groan about our economy when it’s down just a little bit, while we are still head and shoulders—all the way to the waist—richer than any other nation on the face of the earth. And all we can do is complain and moan and groan about what we have got or what we don’t have. There aren’t very many people out there telling us about our *moral problems*.

A lot of the preachers, I’m afraid, have come to the place where sin doesn’t seem to be particularly big deal to them anymore. Maybe it’s because we don’t want them to. Maybe it’s because the people of this country don’t want to hear it any longer. And we’ve gotten to the place where people shacking up is no big deal. And if a preacher were to come into the congregation and thunder from the pulpit and, you know, preach out of God’s word and say, “Here, the Bible says we should get married if we’re going to live together.” If he would condemn this cohabitation trend, would he be able to keep his job? Some would, some wouldn’t. But you just don’t hear a lot about it. It’s easier to just ignore it, brush it under the table, don’t pay any attention to it, and go on down the road.

Now, I don’t know what God thinks about this, necessarily, in every aspect. Because, you know, people who are living together know what they’re doing. All I know is what the Bible says, and we have got a trend in our country today of what the Bible calls “fornication”—of people, you know, hopping from bed to bed, of one-night stands, of hooking up. We have a moral cesspool, sexually, out there that is tearing this nation apart and tearing families apart, and I don’t know what makes us think that we’re going to be able to go on indefinitely with our families *coming apart on every side*.

I remember one day, after having watched too much television, I guess, I was driving along a roadway and I saw a wedding—people coming out of a church—and I found, much to my surprise, I was shocked at myself. I said, “Oh, I’m surprised people are still getting married!” Because if you watch television too much, you begin to wonder why on earth anyone *bothers* with marriage. It’s easier to move in and move out—much cheaper and, of course, you don’t have to worry about divorces and all that kind of stuff. But that’s the pattern that’s developing in our society. And what are the preachers saying about that? What do the prophets have to say about it? I have to consider that one of the reasons why this nation is in moral decline (and, to tell you the truth, we are) is because the prophets have seen vain and foolish things, the preachers have not *discovered the iniquity*—that means *uncovered* the iniquity. They haven’t gotten up in their pulpits on Sunday or Saturday morning and *stripped apart*—taken away the covering—for the sins of the people and *told them* what’s happening to them and where they’re going. Verse 18:

Lamentations 2

AKJV

¹⁸ Their heart cried to the LORD, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: [...]

The *wall* is weeping.

Lamentations 2

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] give yourself no rest; let not the apple of your eye cease.

¹⁹ Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out your heart like water before the face of the LORD: lift up your hands toward him for the life of your young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

²⁰ Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom you have done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? [...]

Yeah, that sort of thing happened in the sieges of the ancient cities. People ate anything they could—sometimes their own children, sometimes the afterbirth. By the way, do you know how long a span is? Stretch your hand out. The distance between the end of your thumb and the end of your little finger, roughly, is what the Bible calls a “span”. It’s a fetus, isn’t it. And here he calls it *their children*, and they were eating them in the siege.

I look back on this and it breaks my heart to even think about it. But it is a reality of the ancient world and it’s a reality of a people who turn their back on God, no longer cared to hear what God had to say, who broke down the hedge that God had put around them for lack of maintenance of it, who turned their back on the principles and God himself—upon the love of neighbor—and, finally, began to *reap the results* of it in the generations that followed. This is what happened. It happened before—wonder what makes us think we’re immune from having it happen to us again.

In a way, there’s a part of me that hates reading the scripture to you over the air. But if I’m going to be honest with Jeremiah Lamentations, if I’m going to be honest with Jeremiah’s memoirs (which is what his book and the Book of Lamentations are) we’ve got to look at it—because it’s *here*, it’s a part of history, and it’s something for us to learn from. Jeremiah, actually personifying *in himself* the children of Israel, as he thought this thing through came to some conclusions that are important. He said:

Lamentations 3

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD:

¹⁹ Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

²⁰ My soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

Now, what he’s saying is that, “All the stuff I’ve been through has been very humbling, and then”:

Lamentations 3

AKJV

²¹ This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

²² It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

Now, that seems like a strange thing to say when city has fallen and people have been hurting, but you’ve got to realize that, all the time, God has said, “I don’t want this. This is not the way I want this to go. Here’s the way to *avoid* all this!”, and they wouldn’t have it *any other way*. And he said, “Frankly, if it hadn’t been for God’s compassion we would have been *completely destroyed*—there would be nothing left of us at all. So I guess we can say that God was merciful, God was compassionate. He let us off with a *whole lot less* than we deserved.”

Lamentations 3

AKJV

²² [...] his compassions fail not.

²³ They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ The LORD is my portion, said my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

²⁵ The LORD is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

²⁶ It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

Sometimes, folks, you don't have any other choice.

Lamentations 3

AKJV

²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke of his youth.

If something like this is going to happen to you, it's a good thing to have it happen when you're *young* because you've got a long time to *use* the lessons you learn from it. He goes on to say in verse 31:

Lamentations 3

AKJV

³¹ For the LORD will not cast off for ever:

³² But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

³³ For he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

That statement so important, I'm going to read it to you again. Don't ever forget it.

Lamentations 3

AKJV

³³ [God] does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

We get afflicted because we *won't listen* to God. Jeremiah learned that God does not afflict *willingly*.

Lamentations 3

AKJV

³⁴ To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth.

³⁵ To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

³⁶ To subvert a man in his cause, the LORD approves not.

So we just have to conclude that whenever all this stuff starts coming down around our ears, *we've got it coming*. He will say in verse 39:

Lamentations 3

AKJV

³⁹ Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

If we're still alive we've not got much to complain about, frankly. Because the wages of sin is *death* and we might very well have brought death upon ourselves a long time before.

Lamentations 3

AKJV

⁴⁰ Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

⁴¹ Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens.

⁴² We have transgressed and have rebelled: you have not pardoned.

⁴³ You have covered with anger, and persecuted us: you have slain, you have not pitied.

⁴⁴ You have covered yourself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.

Well, they *finally* began to realize just how *tough* it could all be. Chapter five, verse 17:

Lamentations 5

AKJV

- ¹⁷ For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.
¹⁸ Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk on it.
¹⁹ You, O LORD, remain for ever; your throne from generation to generation.
²⁰ Why do you forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?
²¹ Turn you us to you, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.
²² But you have utterly rejected us; you are very wroth against us.

Jeremiah's lamentation alternates between hope and despair, but it seems to *end* in despair. But these are the words of a man sitting in the ruins of a destroyed city. The *hope* would come later. We'll come back to Jeremiah in the next program. Until then, I'm Ronald Dart and you were *born to win*.

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