Memory Text: “‘Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,’ says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 2:3)

Setting The Stage: Crisis – “a time a intense difficulty, trouble, or danger,” or a “time when an important or difficult decision must be made.” The word harkens back to the late Middle English (1150 – 1570 A.D.) period, denoting the turning point of a disease. The general sense of the word, “decisive point,” dates from the early 17th century.

Today you’ll hear the word crisis used in reference to the economy, energy, water, fire, migrants/refugees, certain diseases, veterans, women, marriages, emotions, and the list could go on. Crisis management is the process by which a business or other organization deals with a sudden emergency situation. It’s good to know what to do in moments like these.

The worst crisis a person can face however is a spiritual crisis. You can know the extent of the crisis by observing what it takes to get out of one. When you consider the human race, our condition, and the effort heaven made to get us out of this mess (the death of Jesus Christ), you can know that the best word to describe our situation would be “crisis.”

The worst crisis a nation can face is a spiritual one. When we think of the fall of the Roman Empire, for example, it first fell morally – its leaders, then its people. This was followed by its physical fall when it was attacked and carved up by invaders. God’s people at the time of Jeremiah experienced a spiritual crisis, a crisis within, which was of much more concern than the threats of war coming from without. It’s important to realize that the outside threats could have been dealt with successfully if the spiritual crisis within had been solved. It’s the same today.

If we are at peace with God and He has our hearts, we are in a much more favorable situation to handle the external “crises” that come. But if we resist God’s warnings to turn from sin (the root cause of spiritual crisis), then we will find it very hard to handle difficulties when they come.

Sunday – A Quick History
Judges 2:1-15

Jeremiah, a man called in his youth from the priest-city of Anathoth, to become, what someone termed him, “the heartbroken prophet with a heartbreaking message,” to the southern kingdom of Judah during the last 40 years of Judah’s
existence as a kingdom. His messages of warning bathed in tears of compassion, are recorded in the Bible book bearing his name.

It is a book not easy to arrange chronologically or topically for “his broken heart caused him to write a broken book.” Yet the book contains appeals designed to reach the heart of the people of God. He was the prophet of heart religion as we will begin to see in today’s lesson.

First, a little history. The beginning of Israel’s woes essentially starts 800 years earlier (1400 B.C.) when a new generation arose, after the death of Joshua, that didn’t “know the Lord.” (Judges 2:10) The later crisis of Jeremiah’s time had been festering for centuries, which shows two things: the insidiousness of sin and the tremendous mercy of God.

**Judges 2:1-10. What caused the crisis?** Judges 1:27-36 (esp. v. 28) delineates the lack-luster efforts of the various tribes that did not completely *drive out* the inhabitants of Canaan who became a continual snare to God’s people. Actually, God suffered the heathen nations to stay in order “to prove Israel,” or to try them in the sense of bringing trying experiences that will awaken people to their true condition (Judges 2:21-23). God hoped that they would learn that apostasy does not pay.

What lesson can we learn about the danger of parleying with sin, or anything in our life that weakens our faith in God or fidelity to Him? Does the command, “Drive them out!” still have force in our lives today? How does James 2:10 help us understand the danger of harboring just one sin? We are only as strong as our weakest link. A fortified city is only as safe as one unlocked gate. One cherished sin will be our downfall, just as pride transformed Lucifer to Satan.

God raised up judges to help ease the burden (Judges 2:16), but just one would deliver them from their oppressors, the people went back to their idol worship and imitation of the nations around them. After the time of the Judges, the nation entered a time of peace and prosperity under the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon that lasted about 100 years. After the death of Solomon, however, Israel was split into two factions – Israel in the north, Judah in the south.

**Monday – The Two Kingdoms**

1 Kings 12:26-31

The blame for the break up of the nation of Israel can squarely be placed on Solomon, who started out so well, trusting God and depending on His promises, but who drifted away from the Lord one small step at a time (because that’s all it really takes).

**1 Kings 11:1-4. What led to Solomon’s downfall?** Foreign women (and many of them) who served other gods, influenced Solomon to the point that He served God with a divided heart, which in turn heavily influenced the nation to stray from God
too. For if Solomon the king could allow idols into his home, then what would prevent the people from letting them into their homes?

Certainly, the enemy seeks to lead us astray through many devices. Apart from sensual pleasure, what are some of the other strategies the devil have up his sleeve? How does practicing Ex. 20:3, 4 help preserve us from fall prey to the devil's schemes? “Whatever we cherish that tends to lessen our love for God or to interfere with the service due to Him, of that we do make a god.” (Patriarchs & Prophets, p. 305)

Although Solomon repented and was sorry for the mistakes he made, the damage had been done, and God declared that the kingdom was to be divided (but not before Solomon’s death) – Jeroboam was to rule the northern ten tribes, and Rehoboam, Solomon’s vacillating son (he had an Ammonite mother), was to rule the two southern tribes (1 Kings 11:31-36).

After the death of Solomon, Rehoboam was coronated king and given an opportunity to bring relief to Israel who had been heavily taxed during Solomon’s reign. Neglecting the wise counsel of the elders Rehoboam added to Israel’s burden and the results of this rash decision was irreversible. The kingdom became divided. To make up for his loss Rehoboam fortified his kingdom. He was successful, not because of his own effort, but because Judah gave themselves over to God’s lordship (2 Chron. 11:16, 17). Unfortunately Rehoboam didn’t take advantage of the tremendous opportunities God provided and ended up giving himself over to idolatry.

All the while Jeroboam, fearing the people would go down to Jerusalem to worship and thus losing his influence, built two places of worship (Bethel and Dan) and two golden claves, representations of God. This proved a snare to God’s people (1 Kings 12:30), and from this point on Israel suffered a steady spiritual decline. Fifty years after the death of Solomon the king was an idolater, their queen a heathen, and their capital city boasted a temple to Baal. For over two hundred years Israel had sown the wind, and they were about reap the whirlwind.

What happened? In 722 B.C., Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, put an end to the nation, and transported its inhabitants to different parts of his kingdom (2 Kings 17:1-7) effectually causing Israel to disappear from history for a while.

The southern kingdom was spared this humiliating end, at least for now. Some kings served God faithfully, but unfortunately others slowly and gradually led Judah deeper into apostasy exposing them to the plans of the Babylonians. By the time Jeremiah came on the scene Judah was close to being subjugated by a foreign power. God sent Jeremiah to help them avoid what seems like the inevitable.
Tuesday – Two Evils
Jeremiah 2:1-28

Read Jer. 2:1-12. A lot of sad history lay behind the impending crisis that Jeremiah was to prophesy about. Israel’s initial “holiness to the Lord” (v. 3) when He brought them out of Egypt was lost after God had brought them into Canaan, after which time the prophets prophesied by the prophets of Baal (v. 8).

Jeremiah 2:13: “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Jeremiah uses an interesting image to illustrate the twofold sins of Israel. Archaeological excavations often encounter cisterns hewn into the rock and covered on the inside with plaster. They were used to collect rainwater and preserve it. However, the water often became stagnant, and the plaster inside the cistern would crack so that the water disappeared.

The image demonstrates the contrast between true and surrogate (or substitute) religion, between God’s provisions of life and man-made imitations of that. When we dig our own cisterns to preserve a different type of water from what God provides, it is an exercise that is doomed to fail from the beginning.

Israel embraced a surrogate religion by erecting images as representations of God, by building rival temples to the one in Jerusalem, and established a new priesthood outside of the tribe of Levi. Judah, on the other hand, had embraced a surrogate religion by placing their confidence in their knowledge that they were following God’s plan, which led to a formal, empty, loveless type of religion. Jesus offered Himself as the living water (John 4:14).

In what ways can we be embracing a surrogate religion and forsaking Christ? Does practicing righteousness by works have anything to do with this? With what other symbols does God portray this substitute religion that can help us answer these questions?

God presents His people as playing the prostitute, going after other God’s (v.20); as the “noble plant” that has become “degenerate” because it said it comes from an “alien vine” (v.21); as someone who cannot get clean (v.22); as a “dromedary” or she-camel that breaks away from her owners (v.23); as a female “wild donkey” that is in heat (v.24). Israel is committing spiritual adultery – running after other gods, to help her in her time of crisis. Who do we run to in our moments of crisis?

Wednesday – The Babylonian Threat
Jeremiah 25:8-12; 27:6

During the early days of Jeremiah’s ministry (7th C) three great nations, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were struggling for supremacy. Under Ashurbanipal Assyria had reached its peak and was on the decline. Egypt had thrown off the Assyrian
yoke and was seeking to regain its former dominance in that region. With Nabopolassar’s rise to the throne of Babylon the rise to power of the Neo-Babylonian Empire began. The fate of Assyria was sealed with the fall of Nineveh, and the new Babylonian power became the dominant power. Under Necho II, Egypt challenged the sudden rise of Babylon to power. Nebuchadnezzar II, Nabopolassar’s son, successfully met the challenge at Carchemish in 605 B.C., and Babylon replaced Assyria as a world empire.

It was against this political backdrop that Jeremiah did his work and Judah refused to heed the message of the prophet. Judah was caught between these military battles. Judah became a vassal state of Babylon. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, could only stabilize his country by swearing allegiance to the Babylonian king. However, many didn’t want to be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. They wanted to fight and free themselves from the oppression, although that wasn’t what God had in mind.

What had God said about the rise of Babylon? Jer. 27:6: “And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him.” The sudden rise of Babylon had not taken God by surprise. In fact, it was a part of God’s plan to allow Babylon to oppress Judah in the hopes she would turn back to God.

Jeremiah 25:8-12: Did the people listen to the prophet? Do we? How many times have we insisted on believing or doing something even though we’ve been given plenty of evidence that what we wanted to do or believe was wrong?

Thursday – Swearing Falsely
Jeremiah 5:1-3; Leviticus 19:12

Jer. 5:1. Telling people to run through the streets to find someone who does justice and truth is equivalent to suggesting that that apostasy had become so rampant it had become hard to find anyone following God and doing what was actually right. This brings to mind the story of when God told Abraham that if he could find 50 people in Sodom (soon reduced to 10), He would not destroy the city.

Jer. 5:2, 3. No matter how deeply fallen the nation had become, many of the people believed that they were still faithfully following the Lord. They were uttering His name but doing falsely instead of truth. They rejected the warnings that came from God and took confidence in their own understanding and comforted themselves with the idea that because the temple was still standing all was well (Jer. 7:4). It’s one thing to be in a crisis, but when you are in one and don’t know it, that is even more dire.

Leviticus 19:12: “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”
Matthew 10:32, 33: “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

“The disciples might speak fluently on doctrines, they might repeat the words of Christ Himself; but unless they possessed Christlike meekness and love, they were not confessing Him. A spirit contrary to the spirit of Christ would deny Him, whatever the profession. Men may deny Christ by evilspeaking, by foolish talking, by words that are untruthful or unkind. They may deny Him by shunning life’s burdens, by the pursuit of sinful pleasure. They may deny Him by conforming to the world, by uncourteous behavior, by the love of their own opinions, by justifying self, by cherishing doubt, borrowing trouble, and dwelling in darkness. In all these ways they declare that Christ is not in them.” (Desire of Ages, p. 357)

Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

What do these verses tell us about the importance of not only knowing the right thing to do, but also doing the right thing? We need to be careful about not only knowing the truth, but also practicing it - a sure safeguard of self-deception.

Appeal: Jeremiah’s message was given to warn God’s people of the spiritual crisis they were in. National apostasy led to national ruin, and the price paid for forsaking God was heavy. For years God sought to lead His people in just paths, but they resisted and resisted until it was too late. Yet God wasn’t finished with His people yet, and He’s not finished with us. Will you follow God’s will for your life, not so you can avoid problems, but that you will truly live?