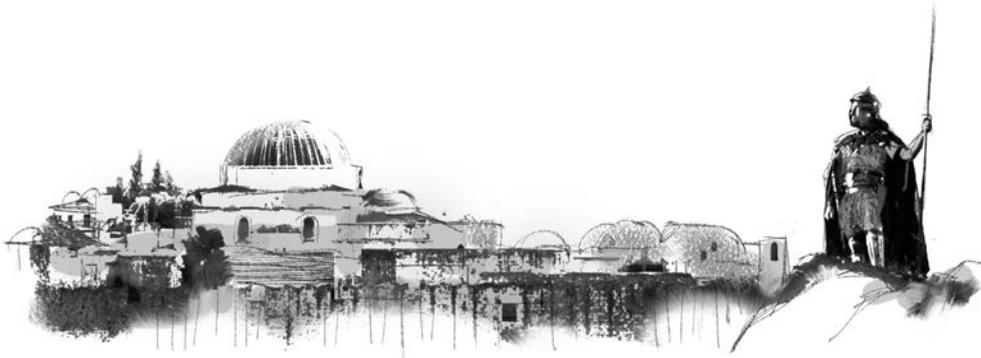


# The Crisis<sup>1</sup> (Within and Without)



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 3

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Judges 2:1–15; 1 Kings 12:26–31; 2 Chronicles 33:9, 10; Jeremiah 2:1–28; Jeremiah 5:2, 3.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Your people were holy to me. They were the first share of my harvest. All those who destroyed them were held guilty. And trouble came to their enemies,’ announces the LORD” (Jeremiah 2:3, NIV).

**IF WE COULD PICK ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE HUMAN CONDITION SINCE THE FALL, IT WOULD BE CRISIS.** How bad it is can be best understood by what it took to get us out of the crisis. This would be the death of Jesus on the cross. The crisis must be pretty bad. Just think about what Jesus went through to solve this crisis.

All through the Bible, many stories take place in one crisis or another. The situation during the time of Jeremiah and his ministry (work done for God) is no different.

God's people faced many challenges, both from within and from without. Unfortunately, many terrible threats came from foreign nations around Israel. But in many ways the greatest crisis came from within. Within meant not just an evil leadership and evil priesthood, which were bad enough. Within meant the people whose hearts had been so hardened and damaged by sin and backsliding (returning to evil) that they refused to listen to the warnings that God was sending them.

Sin is bad enough. But when you refuse to turn away from it—talk about a crisis!

## DEFINITIONS

1. crisis—a time of great danger or threat.

## A QUICK HISTORY (Judges 2:1–15)

The Israelites finally had entered the Promised Land after years of wandering in the wilderness. But it was not long before troubles began. All it took was for a new generation who did not “know the LORD” (Judges 2:10, NKJV) to arise. And a spiritual crisis started that infected the nation all through its history. It is a problem that has infected the Christian church too.

**Read Judges 2:1–15. What caused the crisis? And how did it show up?**



**“The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD” (Judges 2:11, NIV).**

Judges 2:11 says, “Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD” (NKJV). Each generation after the other moved one step further from God until the nation was doing exactly what the Lord had told them not to do. Due to their sin, they faced one crisis after another. But even then the Lord did not give up on them. He sent them judges (Judges 2:16), who saved them out of their troubles.

After the era of the judges, the nation entered a time of peace and prosperity under what has been called “the United Monarchy,” the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon. This period of time lasted about one hundred years. Under David, then Solomon, Israel grew into a powerful nation among its neighboring countries.

But the “good” times did not last. After the death of Solomon (about 931 B.C.), the nation split into two groups, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Much of the blame can be put on Solomon. For all his wisdom, Solomon made many mistakes. “The tribes had long suffered serious wrongs under the rule of Solomon. King Solomon’s heavy spending during his backsliding led him to tax the people heavily and to require of them much lowly service.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*, pages 88, 89. Things were never the same again for God’s chosen nation. Everything the Lord had warned them not to do, they did. So, they reaped the sad results.

**Think about the problem of the next generation not having the values and beliefs of the one before it. How have we, as a church, dealt with this issue? How can we learn to pass on our values to those who follow us?**

**THE TWO KINGDOMS (1 Kings 12:26–31)**

So, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Afterward things went from bad to worse. In the Northern Kingdom, King Jeroboam made some terrible spiritual choices that had a long-lasting influence for evil.

**Read 1 Kings 12:26–31. What should this tell us about how our judgment can be blinded by the situation we find ourselves in?**

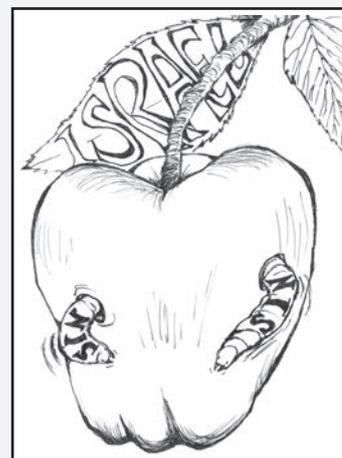
The king’s introduction of idol worship helped to put the nation on a terrible course. “The backsliding introduced during Jeroboam’s rule became more and more marked. Then it led to the utter ruin of the Northern Kingdom.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 107. In 722 B.C., Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, put an end to the Northern Kingdom and sent its people to different parts of his empire (read 2 Kings 17:1–7). There was no turning back! For a time, Israel disappeared from history.

Things were not as bad in the Southern Kingdom. But they were not great either. As with the Northern Kingdom, the Lord tried to save these people from the same terrible things that happened to the Northern Kingdom. This time the Babylonians were the threat to the Southern Kingdom. Unfortunately, Judah had a series of kings who continued to lead the nation into deeper backsliding.

**What do 2 Chronicles 33:9, 10, 21–23 and 2 Kings 24:8, 9, 18, 19 say about the rule of some of Judah’s kings?**

In the Southern Kingdom many bad kings ruled. But many of the prophetic<sup>2</sup> books of the Bible, including Jeremiah, were written during these times. These books contain the words of the prophets whom God sent to His people. God tried hard to turn the people away from the sin and backsliding that was eating at the heart of the nation. The Lord was not going to give up on His people without giving them plenty of time and opportunity to turn from their evil ways.

**It is so hard to step out of your own culture and environment and look at yourself without emotion (strong feeling). In fact, it is not possible. So, why must we always test our lives against the standard of the Bible? What other standard do we have?**



**Sin was eating at the heart of the nation.**

**DEFINITIONS**

2. prophetic—having to do with explaining what will happen in the future and giving God’s special messages to His people.

## TWO EVILS (Jeremiah 2:1–28)

It was against this background that the young Jeremiah began his work as a prophet. “The word of the LORD” came to Jeremiah, and he spoke it hoping that the people would listen to these words and be saved from the ruin that was sure to come.

**Read Jeremiah 2:1–28 and answer the following questions:**

**What promises had God made to the nation when they were faithful? (Read verses 2, 3.)**

**What were some of the priests, pastors, and prophets doing that was sinful? (Read verse 8.)**

**In what terrible ways were the people deceived (tricked) about their true spiritual condition? Read verses 23, 24.**



**Jeremiah said that when the people left the Lord, it was the same as making broken cisterns that could not hold any water at all.**

The nation had experienced some spiritual changes under the leadership of Hezekiah and Josiah. But the people turned to their old ways and fell into worse backsliding. As he did all through his ministry, Jeremiah spoke strongly about what was going on.

Jeremiah’s words in Jeremiah 2:13 are very interesting. The people had done two evils: they had left the Lord, the Fountain of living waters. So, as a result, they made for themselves broken cisterns (water tanks) that could not hold any water at all. By leaving the Lord, they had lost everything. These words become even more meaningful when we remember what Jesus said in John 4:10.

**In Jeremiah 2:5, the Lord said that the people had gone after “worthlessness.” As a result, they had become “worthless” (ESV). The Hebrew words for both “worthlessness” and “worthless” come from the same Hebrew word (*hbl*) that is often translated as “vanity.” It also means “a vapor” or “breath.” How does going after worthless things make us “worthless”? What does that mean? How does this idea help us understand those who, at times, feel as if their lives are meaningless or worthless? What is the answer for them?**

**THE BABYLONIAN THREAT (Jeremiah 27:6)**

The background to the political events during Jeremiah's ministry are lost to history. Many of the details are not available. But we do have in the Bible (with the help of archaeological finds<sup>3</sup>) more than enough information to give us a general picture of what took place. It might seem that no one was in control as these nations battled it out for land and power. But the Bible teaches us differently.

**Read Jeremiah 27:6. How should we understand this?**

In the early years of Jeremiah's ministry, the little kingdom of Judah was stuck in the military battles between Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria. When the Assyrian Empire was losing power in the late seventh century B.C., Egypt tried to regain power and control in the area. But at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., Egypt was crushed, and Babylon became the new world power.

Babylon made Judah its vassal (servant) nation. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, could keep the country under control only by swearing loyalty to the Babylonian king. But many in the country did not want to be loyal to Babylon. They wanted to fight and free themselves from the Babylonians. That was not what the Lord planned for them to do. Instead, God was using Babylon as His tool to punish Judah for its backsliding.

**Read Jeremiah 25:8–12. What was Jeremiah's message to the people of Judah?**

Again and again Jeremiah warned the people about what would happen because of their sin. Often many of the political and religious leaders refused to listen to the warnings. Instead, they believed that the Lord would save them. After all, they were God's special people.

**When was the last time you believed what you wanted to believe, no matter how wrong that belief was? What lessons have you learned so that the same thing does not happen again?**

**DEFINITIONS**

3. archaeological finds—things that someone has found from hundreds of years in the past; the things people find when they dig to find old cities.

## SWEARING FALSELY (Jeremiah 5:1)

In Jeremiah 5:1, the Lord tells the people to run through the streets and see “if you can find one honest person who tries to be truthful. If you can, I will forgive this city [Jerusalem]” (NIRV). This brings to mind two stories. One is about Diogenes. He was a Greek philosopher of the fourth century B.C. One story about him says that he used to walk around in the marketplace in the daytime. He claimed that he was looking for an honest man. The other story is that of God speaking to Abraham. God tells him that if He could find 50 righteous (holy) men (soon reduced to ten), He would not destroy the city.

But the real point is that the Lord spoke through Jeremiah to show just how bad the backsliding and sin had become among His people. Was there not one honest person who tried to be truthful and just?

**Read Jeremiah 5:2, 3. How bad were things becoming in Jerusalem? Read Leviticus 19:12.**



**It is one thing to know you are in a crisis (trouble). But what's even worse is to be in one and not know it.**

These verses bring up a point that appears all through the book. No matter how sinful the nation had become, many of the people believed that they were still faithfully following the Lord! They were still claiming His name. But they were doing it “falsely” instead of “in truth, in justice, and in righteousness” (Jeremiah 4:2, ESV), as the Lord had commanded them. They did not listen to the warning coming from God. Instead, they went on with their lives and religious practices as if everything were all right between them and God. But the fact is that almost nothing was right between them.

How deeply they were deceived can be understood from Jeremiah 7:4. It tells us that the people would take a false comfort in these words: *hekhal yhwh hekhal yhwh hekhal yhwh hemma!* (“This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.”) They were acting as if the temple was all that they needed in order for everything to go well with them. It is one thing to know you are in a crisis (trouble). But when you are in one and do not know it, that is an even worse situation.

**With all the wonderful truth we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists, how can we make sure we do not fall into the false idea of thinking that our special religion itself is enough to save us?**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “You must not do as we’re [we are] doing here today. All of us are doing only what we think is right” (Deuteronomy 12:8, NIV). “The LORD your God will do those things if you obey him. I’m [I am] giving you his commands today. And you must obey all of them. You must do what is right in his eyes” (Deuteronomy 13:18, NIV). “In those days Israel didn’t [did not] have a king. The people did anything they thought was right” (Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25, NIV).

There are very important differences between God’s way and man’s way. In this day and age many people rebel (fight) against the idea of being told by an outside authority what to do or being told what is right and wrong. They want to do things their way. These people do whatever they think is “right” in their own eyes. The problem is that what is “right” in someone’s own eyes is often wrong in God’s. That is why we have to surrender everything, even our own conscience, to the Word of God. We need to know what is right in God’s eyes.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What are some examples you can think of where “good” people did very bad things? Maybe they thought at the time that what they were doing was right, but it was not. Many cultures today look back in horror at what was done in the past. What lessons can we learn from this? Why should we surrender to the teaching of the Bible and be very careful in how we interpret the Bible? People sometimes use Bible verses to support the bad things they do. What should this tell us about how important the Ten Commandments are as a foundation for all of our beliefs?
- 2 As we study Jeremiah this quarter, keep in mind the idea that the people believed that they were right with God even though they had been warned of their true condition. What could have caused them to be so deceived about their true condition? What message should this have for us, too?