

Now the ***THEME*** of our service this morning is ***CRISIS***--- how human nature copes with crisis... with tragedy... with sudden events which shake the very roots of our lives. And that is an acid test of our ***CHARACTER***---how we respond in the crisis. And it's lovely when you discover in the crisis that God can see you through. For example, driving down to Cornwall last Saturday, quite suddenly a little mini (car) right in front of me stopped so quickly and turned right without any warning. I knew I could stop in time, but in my driving mirror I saw a couple of motorbikes tearing hard on my tail. And one just had time to send up a flash-prayer, jam the brakes on, swerve; but then, *'thump'*, and a motorbike was into the back of me, and the driver was in the road. And yet it's in crises like that that you find that God gives you an incredible serenity---complete ***PEACE*** and an ability to deal with what needs dealing with. And so, we're going to pray now about meeting crises. Some of you have had a crisis THIS week. Some of you will have one ***NEXT*** week. I hope this morning's service is going to ***PREPARE*** you for it… or help you ***THROUGH*** it. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, for most of us today it's just like any other Sunday and it follows a week which was just like many other weeks. But for some of us this is a special Sunday, because in the last few days we have realized that life is demanding a ***DECISION*** of us. Help us to see how ***TYPICAL*** of life this is---that for long periods at a time things continue on their course as they are, and then quite suddenly or slowly, they confront us with a CHOICE. And when this happens to us, may we recognize it as ***YOUR DOING*** that life is designed to be a mixture of ***CONTINUITY*** and ***CHANGE***, that the Bible presents just such a story of periodic crises, of crossroads, of moments for action. So often, Lord, we substitute ***THINKING*** for ***DOING***. We go on collecting our thoughts long past the time when we ought to have acted one way or the other. Teach us to be less afraid of making mistakes. Help us to learn from the story of Peter: that although we cannot have our time over again, even our worst decisions are not wholly irredeemable. Our relationship with you can still be ***INTACT***, and you will still trust us with further decisions. Make us able to praise you for the crises of life, which face us with ourselves and spur us to grow.

Father, we thank you for the life and teaching of Jesus. We thank you especially for the way he brought things to a head in so many people's lives, enabling them to discover that they can put their trust in ***YOU ALONE***. And 2000 years later, the possibility of believing still comes as a ***CRISIS*** to us. Help us to face it knowing that the decision whether or not to put faith ***IN*** Jesus and ***THROUGH*** Jesus in you, is the ***GREATEST*** one in our lives. We pray for those facing lesser crises---for young people as they choose their jobs and decide their way of life, for those who are embarking on marriage or have come to some crisis in marriage, for parents as they decide things which will affect their children. We pray for all whose decisions affect others---whether at work or in government or in church life---may they survive the strains of responsibility and be equal to the trust which is placed in them and do what they think right without selfishness or fear. We pray too for those who, in the ordinary course of their work, have seen that something is wrong and must ***CHOOSE*** between drawing attention to it and letting things lie. May they be free from the fear of getting involved and yet free too from smugness or malice. May they find satisfaction, not in denouncing what is wrong and exposing those responsible, but in stimulating what would be right and encouraging those who could do it.

Father, we are so much the people our actions make us, that we ask your help, through the Holy Spirit, in the full round of our personal choices---especially when things have gone wrong for us. When the pressures of life make us wonder just who we're trying to be, remind us that the future is always with you, because you raised Jesus even from the crisis of dereliction and death. And we ask it through His name and for his sake, amen.

***THE LORD’S PRAYER***: *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever.* Amen.

This morning we're going to read three chapters. They're not too long: 39, 40 and 41. And though at first sight it's simply an account of certain things that happened in the fall of Jerusalem, and you may first say in your first reaction, "What has all that got to do with ***ME***?" I hope that before the end of this morning, each of you has found yourself in the story. Chapter 39, then. The book of Jeremiah.

*In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and* ***BESIEGED IT****; in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, a* ***BREACH*** *was made in the city. When Jerusalem was taken, all the princes of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate: Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, with all the rest of the officers of the king of Babylon. When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they* ***FLED****, going out of the city at night by way of the king’s garden through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them, and* ***OVERTOOK*** *Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath; and he passed sentence upon him. The king of Babylon* ***SLEW THE SONS OF ZEDEKIAH*** *at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Babylon* ***SLEW ALL THE NOBLES OF JUDAH****.****HE PUT OUT******THE EYES OF ZEDEKIAH****, and bound him in fetters* ***TO TAKE HIM TO BABYLON****. The Chaldeans* ***BURNED*** *the king’s house and the house of the people, and* ***BROKE DOWN THE WALLS*** *of Jerusalem. Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, carried into* ***EXILE*** *to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained.****NEBUZARADAN****, the captain of the guard, left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.*

*Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon gave command concerning* ***JEREMIAH*** *through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying, “Take him, look after him well and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you.” So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, Nebushazban the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So,* ***HE DWELT AMONG THE PEOPLE****.*

*The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the guard: “Go, and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will fulfil my words against this city* ***for evil and not for good****, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day. But I will deliver* ***YOU*** *on that day, says the Lord, and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely* ***SAVE YOU****, and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because* ***YOU HAVE PUT YOUR TRUST IN ME,*** *says the Lord.’”*

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, “The Lord your God pronounced this evil against this place; the Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord, and* ***DID NOT OBEY HIS VOICE****, this thing has come upon you. Now, behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well; but if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go. If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people; or go wherever you think it right to go.” So, the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land.*

*When all the captains of the forces in the open country and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, swore to them and their men, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand for you before the Chaldeans who will come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.” Likewise, when all the Jews who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a* ***REMNANT*** *in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, as governor over them, then all the Jews* ***RETURNED*** *from all the places to which they had been driven and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.*

*Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and said to him, “Do you know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?” But Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam would not believe them. Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, “Let me go and slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he take your life, so that all the Jews who are gathered about you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish?” But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, “You shall not do this thing, for you are speaking falsely of Ishmael.”*

*In the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him rose up and* ***STRUCK DOWN*** *Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him, whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor in the land. Ishmael also slew all the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there.*

*On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing cereal offerings and incense to present at the temple of the Lord. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came. As he met them, he said to them, “Come into Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.” When they came into the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the men with him* ***SLEW THEM*** *and cast them into a cistern. But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, “Do not kill us, for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the fields.” So, he refrained and did not kill them with their companions.*

*Now the cistern into which Ishmael cast all the bodies of the men whom he had slain was the large cistern which King Asa had made for defense against Baasha king of Israel; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain. Then Ishmael* ***TOOK CAPTIVE*** *all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king’s daughters and all the people who were left at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.*

*But when Johaan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the evil which Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, they took all their men and* ***WENT TO FIGHT*** *against Ishmael the son of Nethaniah. They came upon him at the great pool which is in Gibeon. And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the leaders of the forces with him, they rejoiced. So, all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned about and* ***CAME BACK****, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah. But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah* ***ESCAPED*** *from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had carried away captive from Mizpah after he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon. And they went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to* ***EGYPT****because of the Chaldeans; for they were* ***AFRAID OF THEM****, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.*

Before we talk about it together, let's ***SING*** number three on the bulletin. Number three on the bulletin, *'Be Still and Know that I am God'*. Now, as I said last...or a week past Tuesday evening. This does not mean, “Be ***QUIET*** and know that I am God.” I'm afraid most people take it to mean that. It was said when the children of Israel were trapped between the Egyptian army on the ***NORTH***, the mountains on the ***SOUTH***, the desert on the ***WEST***, and the Red Sea on the ***EAST***. And in that ***CRISIS***, they were tempted to run... to panic. And God says, *"Be still. Don't run. Don't panic when you're in a crisis. Stand still---be still---and know that I'm God. Don't rush off in different directions. See what I can do in that crisis."* And this is what they should have done when Jerusalem fell. Instead, didn't you get a sense of ***PANIC***... of running from here to there... wondering whether to go to Egypt. And God was wanting to say, *"Be still, don't panic, don't run. When the crisis hits you and there seems no way out, stay right where you are, and know that I am God."*

Let's sing it.

***SINGING*** (2 Minutes)

Lord, help us from the Bible study this morning to learn how ***NOT*** to panic; how ***NOT*** to rush away from a crisis, but to stand there and let you take over. How we thank you that you are ***GOD*** and not ***MAN***. And so, as we look into this old, old story of people whose lives at first don't seem to bear any resemblance to ours, help us Lord to identify and to understand yourself. For your namesake. Amen.

One of the reasons why we don't identify with the passage we've just read---why we don't say, "That's just how I felt," or, "That's just how I reacted," is that England has not been invaded by a foreign army since 1066, nine hundred and ten years ago. And so, we don't know what it is to have our land taken over by someone else. We don't know what it is to see the town in which we live burned to the ground. We have little experience of these things, and so ***WE DON'T IDENTIFY.*** That very castle over the river, which you can see from the front door of this building, was built by William the Conqueror’s son. And that was the last time Guildford fell under an alien power. And now we just look at the castle as an interesting ruin. It doesn't speak to us of the terrifying days when the enemy marched into the streets of Guildford.

It's of interest to know that when the Germans planned *'Operation Sea Lion'* to invade these shores, and Winston Churchill told us we would fight on the beaches --- in fact, he did not plan that we should fight on the beaches. He planned a line of defense right through Guildford. And some of the pill boxes you see as you go down Hatley Lane are part of the line of defense that was planned to stop the Germans here at Guildford before they got to London. And it might have happened in our lifetime, that once again we'd have ***UNDERSTOOD*** this situation. But most of us here have not understood it. If you go to Jersey or Guernsey, they understand it. For they were the ***ONLY*** part of the United Kingdom that came under a foreign power, and they reacted in exactly the ways that these people reacted. Some of them ***COLLABORATED***; some of them ***RESISTED***; some said the way of peace is to do what the authorities tell us and ***COOPERATE*** with them. Others said "No. We will try and ***ATTACK THEM*** and undo them as much as we can.

And one of the ***TRAGIC EFFECTS*** of being invaded is that often there is a greater a tension among the people invaded than between those people and the occupying forces. It's happening in Russia and behind the Iron Curtain today. Sometimes the greatest tension among Baptists (behind the Iron Curtain) is between those who register with the state and are above ground, and the fellowships that are underground and who do not register and meet unofficially. And that is one of the ***TRAGEDIES*** of being invaded, that morale is sapped by the tensions that arise ***AMONG*** the people who ought to be brothers. Now does that give you a little of the feel of the situation?

***How Seven Different People Reacted to the Fall of Jerusalem***

And this morning we are going to look at ***SEVEN DIFFERENT PEOPLE*** and what befell them and how they reacted, and what ultimately happened to them in this situation of being invaded. And though it's a situation most of us in this church this morning have never known, I want you to ask God for the gift of ***IMAGINATION*** to try and get inside the skins of these people. Try and understand why they did what they did, how they reacted as they did. And some of you, I believe listening to me this morning, know what it is to have your country overrun and know all the problems as to what to do and where to go and who to identify with, and whether to try and fight, whether to take to the hills, or whether to collaborate. This kind of situation is facing Baptist churches in Northern Angola at this very moment. There are pastors being martyred this very year who do not know what to do. There are Christians who do not know whether to take to the ***JUNGLE*** , whether to go over the ***BORDER*** into Zaire, whether to ***STAY***, whether to ***FIGHT***, whether to join a ***GUERILLA BAND*** against the ***M.P.L.A***. They just don't know. And that's the ***DILEMMA***. That's the ***CRISIS***. And it's when a crisis like this is upon you that your ***TRUE MOTIVES*** are revealed: whether you really trust in God or whether you run around from man to man saying, "What shall we do? What should we do?" And if England ever were invaded again and occupied by a foreign power, we would have to decide. We would have to examine our own hearts. We would find what we really were.

Now there are ***SEVEN PEOPLE*** as I've said. And that strikes me first of all as very interesting. These are national events. A capitol city has fallen. A vast imperialist power called Babylon is swallowing up satellite states. And yet the interest in the word of God is in seven individuals. And that is how God sees our world. He sees, not the newspaper headlines. He sees, not the great international events. What he sees is how ***INDIVIDUALS*** react to those events... how they respond to those crises---whether they put their trust in him or panic. And so, God looks down from heaven, not at ***NATIONAL*** events, not at the ***INTERNATIONAL*** scene. He looks at the ***PERSONAL***, and he says, *"How does* ***ZEDEKIAH*** *react? How does* ***EBED-MELECH*** *react? How does* ***NEBUZARADAN*** *react? How does* ***ISHMAEL*** *react?"* And he looks at ***INDIVIDUALS***. And that's what he's doing this morning. The Sunday papers will be full of the headlines of world events, but God looks at YOU not as a crowd. And he says, "Have YOU had a crisis this week? How did ***YOU*** react? Have ***YOU*** felt trapped this week? How did ***YOU*** respond? Have ***YOU*** felt you'd got into a situation where everything had caved in---your little world had collapsed? How did ***YOU*** react?" And that's the ***MESSAGE*** for this morning from the word of God.

So, let's look at each of these seven individuals in turn; and I'm going to ask ***ONE QUESTION*** about each of them. And it's this: "How did they relate to ***JEREMIAH*** in the crisis?" Because he was God's mouthpiece. He was God's man. And their relationship to ***HIM*** was their relationship to ***GOD***. Your relationship to the Lord is revealed by your relationship to the Lord's people every time: *"In as much as you did it or did it not to the least of these, his brethren, you did it or did it not to him."* And therefore, you can tell what their relationship to GOD was by their relationship to ***THE MAN OF GOD***. And we shall see that in every single case their ultimate ***DESTINY***--- their ultimate fortune---depended on their relationship to ***JEREMIAH***, the man who brought them the word of God.

***Personality #1: Zedekiah***

Let's take ***ZEDEKIAH*** first. He's the first individual mentioned in chapter 39. We ***KNOW*** that he knew Jeremiah well. We ***KNOW*** that he was interested in hearing him preach. We ***KNOW*** that he asked him about the word of God for the future of his nation. We ***KNOW*** that Jeremiah gave him advice. We ***KNOW*** that Jeremiah told him exactly what to do. And we ***KNOW*** that Zedekiah never did it.

And here was this man who ***KNEW*** the word of God, who KNEW what to do, who KNEW what God was saying and did nothing about it. So, what happened? Well, quite typically, when he realized they had broken through the wall in the northern part of his city, he escaped through the southern gate through the king's garden. Some of you walked through that just two months back... or three months back. And he escaped there and went down the Kedron Valley. If you've been there, you can remember it. That crack that leads through the wilderness from Jerusalem right down to that deep rift valley---where the Dead Sea, and the Jordan, and Jericho lie---called the Arabah. And he fled. The leader of his people ran and left them to it. It shows what he was made of. This man was a man who had more fear of ***MEN*** than fear of ***GOD***. We saw that a fortnight ago. And so, he ***RAN***! And you know, he could have had his life. He could have remained on the throne --- had he ***LISTENED*** to Jeremiah, had he ***DONE*** what the word of God said; but he ***RAN***! He was more afraid of ***MAN*** than of ***GOD***. So, he ***RAN***! He panicked. He didn't obey the word: *"Be still and know that I am God."* He ***RAN***! He wouldn't stay still, and they ***CAUGHT HIM***. It's a pretty rough story now, and our sensitivities are offended by the crudeness of it. They held him there in chains. And then, in front of his eyes, they took each of his own ***BOYS*** and they slaughtered each one. And then, they took all his ***NOBLES***---all his cabinet ministers---and they killed each one. And then, to make sure that was the last thing he did see, they ***GOUGED HIS EYES OUT.***

He was ***BLIND***. And from the man who had been in a position to ***LEAD***, he became a man who had to be ***LED***. You don't see a ***BLIND*** king on the throne. He can't lead troops into battle. He can't be the leader anymore. And it was a profound punishment for him. Now to us, this is a very cruel and blood-thirsty situation. What a thing to do! In fact, I want to point out that he was treated very ***LENIENTLY***. It was perfectly normal for him to be executed as well. But Jeremiah had said to him, *"Your life will be spared."* He didn't tell him he would be blinded. But he said, *"Your life will be spared."* And so, Zedekiah lived... ***BLIND***.

And in a sense, there was poetic justice in this. The man who ***REFUSED TO SEE***, finished up ***BLIND***. And Jeremiah had told him what to ***SEE***. Jeremiah had told him, for Jeremiah had ***READ*** ***THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES***. And this king ***REFUSED TO SEE***. And so, there came a day when he ***COULDN'T SEE***. And if you ***REFUSE TO SEE*** God's word and ***SEE*** what's coming, then there will come a day when you will ***NOT*** be able to ***SEE*** either. For ***HELL*** is pitch black, and you will ***SEE NOTHING*** in hell. If you ***REFUSE TO SEE NOW***, you will be ***BLINDED***.

***Personality #2: Nebuchadnezzar***

We turn ***SECOND*** to ***NEBUCHADNEZZAR*** himself. Now the trouble is, that most of us have got our main impression of this man from the book of Daniel. And certainly, when you read about Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, the man is a ***MEGALOMANIAC***! The man went ***MAD***, and his hair became long, and his nails became like claws, and he lived in a field, and he ate grass like the animals, because ***POWER*** went to his ***HEAD***.

It was Lord Acton who said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." That is what happened in Nebuchadnezzar. But I want you to remember that Nebuchadnezzar began as a fairly tolerant, humane imperialist, as most dictators did. Adolph Schickelgruber---known to the world better as "Hitler," began in a humane way. He would never have got to power if he hadn't been the answer to unemployment in pre-war Germany. And we owe, to Adolph Hitler, the concept of *'motorways'*---or '*outer bands'*, as he called them. And many of you came to church in a Volkswagen. And it was Hitler who ordered the Volkswagen to be designed and built. And we owe a great deal to that man. Germany owed a great deal to him in the early thirties. Many ***'TYRANTS'*** start as men who want to do ***GOOD*** for their nation; but ***POWER*** goes to their ***HEADS***, and they become ***'MEGALOMANIACS'***.

Now Nebuchadnezzar, when he took Jerusalem, was in his ***EARLY*** days. And he was a man who had some respect for those he conquered, and he treated them tolerantly. And though he had been fighting against Jerusalem for 18 months before he finally breached the walls (and that had cost him a lot of money and a lot of time), nevertheless, he did not do what many of other men would have done in those circumstances in those days. He did not ***KILL*** the people in that city. He **TOOK THEM AWAY** so that they couldn't live in it. He ***BURNED*** their city, but he took them away --- ***ALIVE***. He did not kill the king.

And then he gave the land to the very ***POOR***. Incredible little touch --- that! He looked around for the ***BEGGARS***, who had nothing. He looked around for the ***PEASANTS***, who were little better than slaves. And he said, *"This land is yours. Now look after it. And I am going to give you a* ***GOVERNOR******FROM YOUR OWN PEOPLE****."* And he looked around for a good man. And he found a good man in ***GEDALIAH***. And he said, *"You be governor for me over these poor people. And you can have the land. Behave yourselves, and I won't trouble you. Pay me taxes. But just behave yourselves, and you can have the land."* He was a very tolerant man, was Nebuchadnezzar in the ***EARLY*** days---before it went to his head, and he built great statues of himself, and had people bow down; before he thought he was God and said, *"****MINE*** *is the kingdom.* ***MINE*** *is the power.* ***MINE*** *is the glory."* That is what he said in Daniel (chapter) four. And if you say that, and don't say, *"****THINE*** *is the kingdom.* ***THINE*** *is the power.* ***THINE*** *is the glory,"* as soon as you say "MINE," instead of "***THINE***," you go ***MAD***--- because you think you're God.

But he treated them very ***LENIENTLY***. And above all, he said, *"Now,* ***JEREMIAH****.... Get hold of Jeremiah. Set him free from the prison. Look after him. Give him anything he asks for, but look after him carefully."* Now that's remarkable! Why did he do that? Some would say, "Well, because Jeremiah had been on his side. Jeremiah had been advocating (for) the people to surrender." But I think there is a deeper reason. Deep down in Nebuchadnezzar was a religious streak that recognized ***GOD***---and therefore, a **MAN OF GOD**. Do you remember what Nebuchadnezzar said to Daniel years later? He said, *"Daniel, your God is the 'God of Gods'! Your God is the ruler of kings!"* Nebuchadnezzar knew when he met the ***REAL God***. And so, when he met Jeremiah, he knew that he was meeting a man of the real God. And he said, *"Look after him carefully."*

So, Jeremiah went back home. I think his feelings must have been very ***MIXED*** going back to the little village where he had been a boy. And he had been away 40 years. It was only eight miles, but he ***HAD*** ***NEVER GONE HOME***. He had bought a field there, but he had never gone to see it. He had tried to, but he hadn't been allowed out. He had been ***ARRESTED***. And during the last few years of Jerusalem, he had been in ***PRISON*** in Jerusalem. And how extraordinary! How his heart must have felt MIXED with feelings! Imprisoned by his ***OWN PEOPLE***! Set free by the ***INVADER***! That must have mixed him up for a start! And then, to have had to spend 40 years of his life trying to save a city. And now it's ***GONE***! The temple is gone. Every house is burned to the ground. And he is going back home. He is now 57 years of age. And all his preaching has been for ***NOTHING***. Can you imagine his feelings? And Nebuchadnezzar said, "*Let him go* ***HOME****."*

And so, after 40 years of preaching, warning the city saying, *"Look, it's not... it's not holding out against the Babylonians you should be concerned about. It's the fact that you're* ***HOLDING OUT AGAINST GOD****."* And he pleaded and he pleaded. And then, finally, the city fell. Nebuchadnezzar said, *"Let Jeremiah go* ***HOME****."* He came home to the little village where he had been a boy. He must have thought his ministry was over... that he could settle down in the village and retire, build himself a little bungalow. But you know, his work wasn't over. Events were to overtake him, even in his home village.

***Personality #3: Ebed-Melek***

Let's move on. Let's look at ***EBED-MELEK***. When Jerusalem fell, there was in Jerusalem a foreigner living among the besieged, his name: Ebed-Melek; his home country: what we now call the Sudan (but in biblical days it was called Ethiopia); his skin: black. Who would look after this man when the city fell? No one. Who would protect him? No one. He was a ***FOREIGNER*** in a strange place, and of all people, he would be surely one of the ***FIRST*** to be killed. And this man was afraid. And Jeremiah had a special word from the Lord for this single immigrant. Oh, how like God this is, to think of the stranger within the gates. It's just such a lovely touch of God.

"Jeremiah, I've got a message for you---not for the Babylonian empire, not for the people of Jerusalem, not for the king, but for that little immigrant, Ebed-Melek. I want you to go to him and say, *'God is going to do all the evil that he said he would do to this city. But you don't need to be afraid.* ***YOU WILL LIVE****.' "* Why? Well, do you remember what Ebed-Melek once did when Jeremiah was cast into the ***CISTERN*** and was up to his waist in slime and filth and darkness, so that he couldn't sit down or rest, and got no food--- when he thought his life was ended? It was a little foretaste of Hell. When Jeremiah was in that pit, Ebed-Melek got some ropes and some rags, and he let the rope down and said, *"Put the rags under your armpits. We'll get you out of there, Jeremiah."* That's all he'd done... that's all he'd done.

But you can ***NEVER*** get God in your debt. Even a cup of ***COLD WATER*** given to one of his disciples is noted in the book. God will pay for it. You can ***NEVER*** get God in your debt. And that's all that Ebed-Melek did. He got the man of God out of the slime. That's all he did. But God never forgot. And the things that you have done for people of God are remembered. That is why, in the last day Jesus said, *"I was in prison, and you visited me. I was sick, and you came. I was a stranger, and you invited me home for lunch."* And we say, *"****WHEN*** *did we do that, Lord?" "You did it for one of my brethren, and I haven't forgotten it."*

Isn't God lovely. *"Ebed-Melek, I've got a word for you. 'You will live. I will repay,' "* says the Lord. And this man from Africa ***LIVED***. There were only ***TWO*** people in the whole of Jerusalem who were set free, and stayed on in the land. ***JEREMIAH*** and ***EBED-MELEK***. Remarkable, isn't it?

***Personality #4: Nebuzaradan***

Let me move on to ***PERSONALITY #4***. ***NEBUZARADAN***--Nebuchadnezzar's Captain of the Guard. That's a very polite translation of the Hebrew--Captain of the Guard. Literally it says, *'Chief Butcher'*. But then, the people who did the English Bible usually translate the impolite things rather more politely, for genteel congregations. But he was the Chief Butcher That's the title of the Captain of the Guard under Nebuchadnezzar. And yet he wasn't a butcher. Very remarkable man. You know, some of the ***FINEST*** men are professional soldiers. Some of the finest ***CHRISTIANS*** have been professional soldiers. One thinks of General Dowding or Montgomery. And you'll find there's something about professional servicemen that is ***DIFFERENT***. If you go to a little Baptist Church not many miles from here, you'll see a man singing choruses... lifting his hands, praising God, and you won't look at him twice. But if you did, you'd be looking at an admiral of the fleet who was Commander-in-Chief of the NATO forces for the whole of the Mediterranean. The Holy Spirit just filled him. He's a fine Christian. They say, like the centurion in Capernaum, *"I also am a man* ***UNDER AUTHORITY****. So, you can say, 'Be healed,' and it'll be done. You can give the orders."* They are used to ***OBEDIENCE***, and that's one of the fundamental virtues of human nature. And when national service ended in this country, it'll be a bold man who would say that there has been greater respect for authority and greater obedience among young people since national service ended. Wouldn't he be a bold man to say that? I'm not now justifying war; nor am I, I hope, offending any pacifists among us. But there's something about military men that's very fine. They make great Christians. And here is this man Nebuzaradan. There's a little bit of a ***MYSTERY*** and apparent ***CONTRADICTION*** between Chapter 39 and 40. In 39, he's told to look after Jeremiah carefully and give him anything he wants. In Chapter 40, he's leading Jeremiah in chains to Babylon. Not quite sure how to resolve that one. I've read all the commentaries and none of them satisfies me. So, I'm going to wait until I get to heaven and get hold of them both and say, "Now just what exactly happened?" Maybe one is a condensed account pulling together the beginning and the end of the relationship and omitting the little bit in between.

But let's go back. Do you remember in an earlier chapter in Jeremiah, *"A voice is heard in Ramah---Rachel weeping for her children."* Remember that? When Nebuzaradan was leading away the captives to Babylon in chains---Jeremiah among them, though he was carefully looked after. When they reached Ramah, they heard the voice of a woman weeping, and it came from a GRAVE---the grave of Rachel. And somehow this touched this soldier and he turned to Jeremiah, and he said, *"Take those chains off. I give you a* ***FREE CHOICE****. You can come with me to Babylon, and I'll look after you. Or, you can go and live with your own people. But you're* ***FREE****."* But here is the remarkable thing this Babylonian officer said to Jeremiah, *"It's* ***GOD*** *who's done this to your land, isn't it? It's* ***GOD*** *who said he would do it. Your God is a God who keeps his word, isn't he?"* It's a remarkable statement. And this pagan soldier ***RECOGNIZED THE TRUE GOD*** through Jeremiah---as later, ***CORNELIUS*** would recognize the true God... searching after God, fearing God.

There's something about this man, Nebuzaradan, that really gets me. Where had he learned all this from about God's predictions of Jerusalem. I think as he marched his prisoners north, he had been chatting to them and they'd told him, *"You know, Jeremiah told us that you would come"... "Oh, did he? How long ago?"… "He's been telling us for 40 years."… "40 years? How did he know 40 years ago that we would come"… "Well, God told him."… "God! Whose God? Which God?"… "Well, our God, the God of Israel".* And this pagan officer recognized ***AUTHORITY***. And he said, *"Your God commanded the fall of this city. And it's happened. I recognize* ***AUTHORITY*** *when I see it. So, you are free. I dare not take you in chains. You serve a* ***GREATER*** *authority than Nebuchadnezzar."*

***Personality #5: Gedaliah***

So, that's how he reacted. Let's now look, ***FIFTHLY***, at ***GEDALIAH***, chosen for one of the most difficult assignments a man can ever have---it happened in Jersey during the war, it happened in Paris, it happened in Norway---the man chosen to be ***GOVERNOR OF AN OCCUPIED TERRITORY***... a man from among the people... and he will be under suspicion from ***BOTH***. He will be under suspicion from his ***OWN PEOPLE*** for collaborating. He will be under suspicion from the ***OCCUPYING FORCES*** wondering whether he is playing tricks behind their backs: an unenviable position. If Guildford were occupied by an enemy, would you volunteer for the job of being Chief Borough Executive for Guildford? It's a thankless position. And yet Nebuchadnezzar chose well. He chose a good man, a man who knew just how to negotiate, a man who knew what was best for his people. And he chose this man, Gedaliah, a Jew.

What was Gedaliah's relationship to Jeremiah? Simple. He ***AGREED*** with every word Jeremiah said. Gedaliah knew that Jeremiah had been right all along, and that the way of safety---the only hope of a future---was to collaborate... to surrender and to collaborate. And so, now he and Jeremiah became ***PARTNERS***. They didn't try to rebuild Jerusalem. That would've been folly. The Babylonians would have simply come and knocked it down again. So, they moved just a few miles further north to a hill called ***MIZPAH***, which you can see today. And there they began again. And Gedaliah said, *"Now gather round everybody. Let's gather what few Jews we've got left, and let's plant vineyards and sow corn. Let's believe that God will bless us; and let's just* ***COOPERATE*** *with the Babylonians. Let's not fight.”* And all around the hills were guerilla bands who were gonna go on fighting. And their leaders and the guerillas all heard that Gedaliah was governor, and they all came, and they said, *"We're with you. We're not gonna fight. We'll plant instead of fighting."* And do you know that year they had the ***BEST HARVEST*** they'd had in years; and God, Himself, blessed. And in the ***AUTUMN***, when they gathered the corn and the grapes, they were astonished at how much they got. Oh, if only those people had ***LISTENED*** to Jeremiah two years before, they might still have had the temple, they might still have had Jerusalem; but they didn't listen. But now there was a man in charge who ***DID*** listen. And Gedaliah, he understood that Jeremiah spoke the ***TRUTH***.

And so, they settled down the poor in the land. And Gedaliah himself was a ***POOR*** man, but he was a ***GOOD*** man. He had only ***ONE FAULT***, and it was to prove fatal. It's the fault that other good men have too. It's the fault of ***NAIVETY***. It's the fault of believing that there's only ***GOOD*** in good people. And it's a very big mistake. Jesus never made this mistake. It says in John two that Jesus trusted ***NO MAN***, because he ***KNEW*** what was in man. That's a very solemn statement. Jesus would never trust anyone, because he knew what was in man. When did you last hear a sermon on that text? You see, you can have too ***ROSY*** a view of human nature. You can have too ***CYNICAL*** a view. The ***CYNIC*** says, "Oh, don't trust anybody, they'll always trick you." And then you have the ***NAIVE*** view which Gedaliah had. *"Well, these poor people are not such bad sorts after all. I'm sure they wouldn't do anything to upset the apple cart now."* And Johannan came to Gedaliah, and he said, *"Do you know that one of those guerilla leaders who has come and surrendered and who is living among you... do you know that he's in league with another nation---Ammon---over the other side of the Jordan, and the king of Ammon is paying him to kill you? Did you know that?"* And Gedaliah said, *"You lie. You lie. He wouldn't do that to me."* He was ***NAIVE***. He had too optimistic a view of human nature. You see, when you know your own heart well, and when you know God well, you know that there is ***EVIL*** in the ***BEST*** of us, as well as ***GOOD*** in the ***WORST*** of us. And Gedaliah made the mistake that other rulers have made since. And that is, he failed to realize that ***HIS OWN* SAFETY WAS THE *KEY* *TO HIS PEOPLE'S SAFETY***. And he was being ***BRAVE*** and he was being ***NAIVE***. And he said, *"No, I don't believe that story is true."* But it was true. And Gedaliah is a ***WARNING*** to us not to be over-naive about human nature... to be alert---to be ***AWARE*** of evil, to be ***AWARE*** that there is always somebody who will do the wrong thing... always somebody who can upset the apple cart... always somebody who can destroy what's being built up.

It can happen in a church, and we ought to be ***AWARE*** that one church member can wreck a situation. One church member who is apparently supporting a church, can undo the work that God is doing, building up so that the harvest is coming in. Yes, leaders must ***NEVER*** be over-naive. They must be ***REALISTIC***. As soon as they hear of a possible threat, they must take it seriously. They must realize that the devil can use somebody, even within a little group seeking to reap a harvest. The devil can use someone even ***WITHIN*** to wreck that harvest. And it was only just after they gathered in the harvest that ***ISHMAEL*** came with his guerilla band. And they came and they sat at the dinner table with Gedaliah.

***Personality #6: Ishmael***

And now our attention turns to the ***SIXTH*** person, ***ISHMAEL***. Why did he do it? Was he the temperament that cannot accept defeat. Had he ambitions for himself? Well, there's one ***CLUE*** in the Bible to it. It says he had royal blood in his veins... had royal blood. And his mind was saying, *"Why should Gedaliah, a peasant, be the governor, and I've got royal blood?"* And Satan worked on this ***JEALOUSY*** and ***RESENTMENT***, and so built it up that he accepted the support of the King of Ammon---enemy of Judah. ***WHY*** did the King of Ammon want him on the throne? Well, I expect he thought he could make him a puppet king and extend the empire of Ammon.

I don't know ***WHY***. I know this: that in the Middle East to kill someone after you've accepted their meal is the worst crime of all. ***HOSPITALITY*** is the unwritten fundamental commandment in the Middle East. You must give hospitality to anyone who needs it. You must look after any stranger in your home, and when you accept hospitality, you must accept it graciously. To kill your host is terrible. And yet, Ishmael did it to his fellow countryman, and then he proceeded to take all the people there and he proceeded to take them off with him to Ammon.

Now, what was ***ISHMAEL'S*** relationship to ***JEREMIAH***? None. None. Jeremiah is not mentioned once during the whole of the story of Ishmael. Here is a man who lived without any reference to the word of God at all. And it was this man whom Satan used to ***UNDO THE GOOD*** that was being done. It was this man who ***WRECKED*** the rebuilding of the little nation of God. He had no relationship, whatever to Jeremiah.

***Personality #7: Johannan***

Finally, number ***SEVEN***, we look at the one man who tried to ***REDEEM*** the situation. His name was ***JOHANNAN***. He was another guerilla leader, but he was one who really meant it. When he agreed with Gedaliah about cooperating, he was the very man who'd come to ***WARN*** Gedaliah about the plotted assassination. And so Johannan ***PURSUED*** Ishmael, ***RESCUED*** his captives, but Ishmael ***ESCAPED*** with eight men and got to Ammon. But Johannan brought the others back.

What was he to do with them? He had a few soldiers, a few women, a few children, a few eunuchs---a bit of a motley crew. What should he do? And Johannan was in perplexity. And he said, *"Where do I go? If we go back to* ***MIZPAH****, as soon as Nebuchadrezzar hears that his governor has been assassinated, what's he gonna do? He's gonna come and wipe out the rest of us. Where shall I go??"* I almost need a map. Now here's Jerusalem where my fist is. Mizpah was four or five miles north in the land of Benjamin. So, Johannan took the remaining crew about three miles south of Jerusalem. He took them to some sheep folds outside a little village called ***BETHLEHEM***, and he said, *"I think we'll have to flee to* ***EGYPT****. I think we'll take you to Egypt."* But thank God, before he did, he said, *"But hold on a moment. Let's ask Jeremiah first. Let's ask what the Lord thinks."* And so, he didn't panic. What did the Lord say? Did Johannan ***OBEY*** what the Lord said? Come ***NEXT WEEK*** for the next thrilling installment. I'm not gonna tell you.

***Parallels of History***

I'm going to finish the story there and I'm going to do just something in the last few moments. We have the great advantage (have we not?) of reading the ***OLD*** Testament through the ***NEW***. I wonder at how many points your mind has said, "Why doesn't he mention so-and-so from the New Testament?" Put your hand up if you've said that at all while I've been preaching. One has here... 2, ...3, ...4; any more? 5, ...6, ...7. You've all been jumping into the New Testament. Not ***ALL*** of you, but ***MANY*** of you have been, I think, jumping ahead. Do you know ***HISTORY NEVER REPEATS ITSELF***? That's not a biblical idea. History doesn't repeat itself. It's the ***GREEK*** concept of history, that it goes around in ***CIRCLES***. But the ***HEBREW*** concept of history is a ***LINE*** (under one-way line) that goes from ***PAST*** to ***PRESENT*** to ***FUTURE***; and history NEVER goes back. Having said that, it's remarkable how ***OFTEN*** things that happen at ***THIS*** point of the line, reflect things that happen ***LATER***.

As I look at these ***SEVEN MEN***, I think of people in the New Testament, for when Jesus was born in ***BETHLEHEM*** of Judea, the land was ***OCCCUPIED*** by a foreign army---not the Babylonians, but the ***ROMANS***. And you had a ***PARALLEL*** situation. When I read about ***ZEDEKIAH*** here, the puppet king of ***BABYLON***, I think of ***HEROD***, the puppet king of ***ROME***. And Herod was interested in Jesus. Herod was glad to see Jesus. He hoped to see a miracle performed by Jesus. but Herod had no intention whatever of ***OBEYING THE WORDS OF JESUS*** ---another puppet king with no intention of being obedient.

When I look at ***NEBUCHADNEZZAR***, I think of ***CAESAR***, a benevolent imperialist... Augustus Caesar. And you know, time and time again, they tried to get Jesus to join the resistance movement and they said, *"Should we pay tax to* ***CAESAR****?"* And Jesus held up a coin. He said, *"Whose image is that? You benefit from their coinage, you benefit from their protection, you use their money; then* ***COOPERATE****. And if a Roman soldier compels you to carry his bag* ***ONE*** *mile (as he can), then carry it a* ***SECOND****."* It wasn't popular.

When I read of ***EBED-MELECH***, who do I think of---an immigrant who did a small service for Jeremiah and was rewarded by the Lord? I think of ***TWO PEOPLE***. I think (first) of an ***AFRICAN*** who just did one thing for Jesus. He carried his cross when he couldn't carry it himself. Was he ***REWARDED***? Most certainly. He was given two Christian sons, ***RUFUS*** and ***ALEXANDER***. There it is in the Bible. And I think too (second) of a ***DYING THIEF***, who in our Lord's utter loneliness on the cross when everybody was mocking him, when everybody was cursing him... one dying thief said to Jesus, *"This man has done nothing wrong."* And Jesus said, *"Today, today you'll be with me in paradise."* You can never get the Lord in your debt.

When I look at ZEBUZARADAN... sorry, ***NEBUZARADAN***, I think of the ***ROMAN CENTURION***, whom I've already mentioned. *"I also am a man under* ***AUTHORITY****. Therefore, I recognize God's authority in you."*

When I look at ***GEDALIAH***, I think of ***PONTIUS PILATE***, the man who knew what was right, who tried so hard to keep the two sides together... but who couldn't.

When I think of ***ISHMAEL***, who actually... I missed one part of the story out... who actually slaughtered 80 pilgrims who came to mourn over the temple with beard shaved and bodies gashed and closed torn; he killed them, and he went out to meet them weeping. They were crocodile tears; and he ***SLAUGHTERED*** those pilgrims. When I think of ***ISHMAEL***, I think of ***JUDAS***. "*Judas, do you come to Me with a kiss?"* The one man right in the band of disciples---the one man whom Satan entered into---who wrecked the whole thing, and ***BETRAYED*** Jesus for his own motives.

When I look at ***JOHANNAN***, I don't know quite who to think of... ***NICODEMUS***, who tried to do something at the end? Well, I leave you to think of someone. But you know there are strange ***ECHOES*** all the way through: Jesus born at Bethlehem and his parents being told, *"Flee into Egypt from Bethlehem."* Did you think of that? Jesus predicting the fall of Jerusalem and saying, *"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings, and you would not? Now your house is left to your desolate, and you won't see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.' And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled."* Oh, do you get ***ECHOES*** of that? And in ***AD70*** it was all burned to the ground ***AGAIN***.

When I hear Jesus speak the ***SERMON ON THE MOUNT***, I hear these amazing words: *"The meek shall inherit the earth."* When Jerusalem fell (and it seemed as if the end of the world had come), who got the land? The ***POOR*** in the land were given it. When the end of this world comes, who will inherit the earth? The **MEEK**! Those who haven't grabbed it. Those who haven't been men of power and wealth. The ***MEEK***.

But I think, most of all, as I read these chapters, I thought of the ***DISCIPLES OF JESUS,*** and I thought of them. And I remember that one of the twelve was ***MATTHEW***---a tax collector, a collaborator with the enemy occupying forces. And I thought that another of them was ***SIMON***---the guerilla, the zealot, the leader of the resistance movement. And I thought ***ONLY JESUS*** can bring all those people together. **ONLY JESUS** can bring together in a crisis, those who have completely opposite reactions. ***ONLY JESUS*** can bring all men out of their panic, out of their rush, out of their human ideas and into His kingdom. Now, I thought, “If only Jesus had been around when Jerusalem fell in 587 BC, He would've sorted it all out.”

Why are there so many ***PARALLELS*** between ***THEN*** and ***NOW***? There are ***TWO*** very simple reasons. ***NUMBER 1*** is: ***HUMAN NATURE*** doesn't change. And you know, even though you may not have been able to identify with one of these seven people, I would guarantee that if Guildford were invaded by an enemy, you would read these chapters and you'd see ***YOURSELF*** in one of those seven... somewhere. Human nature doesn't change. You too would have to ***DECIDE***. If you were in Romania or Bulgaria today, you would have to decide. Would you go underground with the underground church, or would you join the state registered church? You would have to ***DECIDE***. Human nature doesn't change. And you would then start criticizing each other, as is happening among Christians behind the Iron Curtain. That's the tragedy of it. And so, Michael Bordeaux says one thing and Richard Wurmbrand says another. And the ***TENSION*** comes. Human nature doesn't change.

But the other reason (***NUMBER 2***) why there are echoes through history is this: ***DIVINE NATURE*** doesn't change either. And the God who dealt with these people is the God who deals with ***US***. And the God who saw through the international events and saw individuals reacting, is the God with whom ***WE*** have to deal. And when the greatest catastrophe of all comes, and this world of ours ends... when all around us billions of people are losing their lives and chaos is around us, and the very heavens are falling and being rolled up like a curtain---when all that's happening---God will see ***INDIVIDUALS***, and how they respond and whether they, *"Stand still, and know that I'm God."*

We are not living in Northern Ireland. But in Northern Ireland today, people are living in ***CRISIS***. They do not know when a bullet will come through their dining room window. And God is testing them, and they are reacting as people reacted here. And somebody, just before the service, gave me a photograph of a Mr. Thomas Pasmore, leader of the Protestant Orange Order in Belfast, showing a Bible holed by a bullet during shooting at his home when terrorists shot his father five times. And the bullets stuck beside Jeremiah 11 verse 11. *"Therefore, thus saith the Lord, 'Behold I will bring EVIL upon them, which they shall not be able to escape. And though they shall cry unto me,* ***I WILL NOT HARKEN UNTO THEM****.' "*

Oh, that men would ***LISTEN*** while they may. Oh, that men would ***SEE*** while they have eyes. Oh, that men would ***ESCAPE***. *"How shall they escape, if they neglect so great a salvation?"* For your ***HUMAN NATURE*** is the same as ever it was. And God's ***DIVINE NATURE*** is the same yesterday, today, and forever… as is Jesus our Savior.

Let us pray. “Oh God, from long ago we've learned the message, and You are just the same. And Lord, with the growing sense of crisis there is upon our planet Earth, we pray that You will teach us now to open our ears and our eyes to Your Word and Your works. Oh Lord, may we be those who, when the crisis comes, *‘Stand still, and know that You are God.’* For Your name's sake. Amen.”