

Jeremiah 12

At the beginning of this chapter Jeremiah grapples with why do the wicked prosper? He pleads with God to bring justice to the ungodly. God promises justice, in His time, and though His people will be disciplined the last verses of this chapter promise His kingdom blessings on Israel and nations that repent as well.

- 1 Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?**
- 2 Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.**

The age-old question of "Why does the wicked prosper?" is asked by Jeremiah. Notice:

1. Jeremiah acknowledges God's righteousness.

"While the most common Old Testament word for just means 'straight,' and the New Testament word means 'equal,' in a moral sense they both mean 'right.' When we say that God is just, we are saying that He always does what is right, what should be done, and that He does it consistently, without partiality or prejudice. The word just and the word righteous are identical in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Sometimes the translators render the original word 'just' and other times 'righteous' with no apparent reason (cf. Nehemiah 9:8 and 9:33 where the same word is used). But whichever word they use, it means essentially the same thing. It has to do with God's actions. They are always right and fair.

"God's righteousness (or justice) is the natural expression of His holiness. If He is infinitely pure, then He must be opposed to all sin, and that opposition to sin must be demonstrated in His treatment of His creatures. When we read that God is righteous or just, we are being assured that His actions toward us are in perfect agreement with His holy nature."

Richard L. Strauss, *The Joy of Knowing God*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1984), p. 140.

"We must then say the righteousness of God is evident in the way He consistently acts in accord with His own character. God always acts righteously; His every action is consistent with His character. God is always consistently "Godly." God is not defined by the term "righteous," as much as the term "righteous" is defined by God. God is not measured by the standard of righteousness; God sets the standard of righteousness."

- (1) God reveals His righteousness by revealing His will and His word to the world through the nation Israel, Deuteronomy 4:5-8.
- (2) God reveals His righteousness by instructing men in His word, Psalm 25:8.
- (3) God reveals His righteousness by fulfilling His promises, Nehemiah 9:7-8.
- (4) God reveals His righteousness by judging the enemies of Israel, Psalm 96:13.

God likewise shows Himself to be righteous when He judges the nation Israel for their sin and disobedience, Daniel 9:7-8.

- (5) God reveals His righteousness in the way He rules, Psalm 89:14.
- (6) God reveals His righteousness in His hatred and in His anger, Psalm 11:5.
- (7) God reveals His righteousness when He shows mercy and compassion, Isaiah 30:18.
- (8) God reveals His righteousness in saving sinners, Psalm 98:2-3.

"The righteousness of God and the justice of God are not secondary matters; they are primary. The righteousness or justice of God is to be the guiding principle for the people of God. When the Old Testament prophets sought to sum up the essence of the Old Testament teaching regarding man's conduct, it was that men practice righteousness or justice:

"When summarizing the very essence of what the Old Testament Law was about, Amos and Micah both spoke first of justice and righteousness. God is not interested in a legalistic keeping of the Law, as though one might make himself righteous by so doing. God is interested in men seeking to know the heart of God and pleasing Him by doing that in which He delights and that which He does.

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2. Jeremiah pleads with God based on His righteousness and talks with God about His justice.

Justice = **משפט** mishpat "a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree (human or (participant's) divine law, individual or collective), including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty.'

3. Why does the wicked prosper? Why are the wicked, who deal treacherously, happy?

It seems unfair to Jeremiah that the wicked prosper and seem to be happy.

Jeremiah, who has acknowledged God's righteousness, is questioning whether God is actually righteous in light of the prosperity and happiness of the wicked.

4. Jeremiah recognizes that God has allowed ("planted") them in their positions of power and their authority has increased. Yet, though they talk about God ("tho art near in their mouth"), their lives are not ruled by Him ("far from their reins"), their lives are a prime example of hypocrisy.

The age-old question of why does the wicked prosper is addressed in Psalm 37, Psalm 73, and the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk questions how God can use a nation more evil than Israel to punish a not as evil, but sinful, nation of Israel. The key for Habakkuk, as well as for us today is:

The key is to focus on God and not the events around us. Where our focus is our thoughts and actions will follow. If we focus on the iniquities of this world we can become bitter or cynical. If we focus on God we might not understand why everything happens but we will be content and joyful. Will we focus on the events around us or on the trustworthiness of God?

3 But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah continues his questioning by comparing himself to the hypocritical, sinful politicians, religious leaders, and even those of the nation who rebelled against God.

God knows that Jeremiah loves Him, that his heart is for God's glory and the best for the people of Israel, and thus asks that the hypocritical rebels be set apart for God's judgement.

4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.

5 If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

6 For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.

Jeremiah wonders how long until God pours out His judgement on this rebellious, hypocritical nation.

7 I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

8 Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it.

9 Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour.

God is speaking here and refers to Israel as: "mine house," "mine heritage" 3x, "dearly beloved of my soul."

The rebellion of Israel, "crieth out against me," results in their destruction by Babylon.

God is in greater agony over what has to be done than the people were in their rejection of God.

- 10 Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.**
- 11 They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart.**
- 12 The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace.**
- 13 They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD.**

The "pastors" (leaders in this case) refer to the political leadership of Babylon that God used to destroy His vineyard Isaiah 5:1-7.

- 1 Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:
- 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.
- 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.
- 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?
- 5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:
- 6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.
- 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry

- 14 Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.**

Ultimately, those who come against Israel will themselves be judged (Genesis 12:3). The inheritance of Israel is the land of Israel. For those nations that come against Israel and took her out of the land, God will destroy them (and take the people of Israel (Judah) out of those countries).

- Joel 3:1 For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,
- 2 I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.

Biblically, it is impossible to separate the land of Israel from the people (Jews) of Israel. Any attempt to do this will bring the judgment of God.

- 15 And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land.**
- 16 And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people.**

"And it shall come to pass..." at the beginning of vs. 15 and 16 speak, ultimately, of the millennial kingdom.

- Vs. 15
1. Israel will be removed from their land
 2. God will have compassion on the Jewish people and bring them back to the land
- Vs. 16
3. If the nations turn to the God of Israel they will be blessed.

"And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory," Jeremiah 4:2.

"When they were in the midst of the nations (vs. 7, 9), it was to God's people's detriment; when the nations are in the midst of God's people, it will be to the nation's spiritual blessing." Charles Feinberg, Jeremiah, page 105

- 17 But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.**

Nations that resist God will be destroyed.