

Message #16**Jeremiah 12:1-17**

When God's people push God to the level that He is angry by their persistence in evil, He will pour out devastating, chastising judgments on His own people and use godless people to do it.

Jeremiah was a faithful prophet of God who faithfully proclaimed the word of God and he was a man who faithfully prayed and talked to God. He would constantly talk to God about all kinds of things. He was very open and honest in his communication with God.

The context of this prayer is significant here. Jeremiah had learned that there were people who were plotting to kill him. So he prayed to God and asked God to destroy them, which God said He would do (11:20-23).

But that started a struggle in Jeremiah's thinking. The struggle in his mind was why God would even permit these people to exist. Why would a Holy God permit godless, evil, unfaithful people to prosper? He was a faithful man of God and a true prophet of God, and he found himself with very little and the object of hatred.

So Jeremiah decided to talk to God about that.

JEREMIAH PRAYS TO GOD ABOUT THE FACT THAT IT DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT AND FAIR THAT GOD PERMITS GODLESS PEOPLE TO PROSPER AND WIN WHILE HIS GODLY PEOPLE SEEM TO STRUGGLE AND LOSE.

It did not seem right to Jeremiah. It did not seem just to Jeremiah and Jeremiah decided to plead his case to God and discuss this matter of what is just with Him. Jeremiah wanted answers to this and he went straight to God to talk to Him about it.

There are two main prayer parts to this:

PRAYER PART #1 – The prayer of Jeremiah to God. 12:1-4

It is quite obvious that Jeremiah has a high and holy view of God's sovereignty and attributes. I want to point out Jeremiah's theology concerning God that he admits to God here. Specifically notice that Jeremiah uses the noun LORD (Jehovah) in this prayer because that is the covenant name God uses in regard to Israel. So Jeremiah has God's covenant people in view in this prayer and he has himself in view in this prayer.

Now there are eleven observations we want to make concerning Jeremiah's concept of God as he prays:

(Observation #1) - He identifies God as righteous. **12:1a**

The word “righteous” (tsaddiq) means God always does what is right in accordance with the word of God and the standards of God. Everything God does meets His standards of righteousness. Just this point means that even if we don’t know what God is doing, He is doing what is righteous.

(Observation #2) - He identifies God as a God of justice. **12:1b**

God is a God of truth and justice. Everything God does is done out of righteousness, justice and truth.

(Observation #3) - He identifies God the Sovereign God who determines prosperity in life.
12:1c

God is the One who determines who prospers and who doesn’t.

(Observation #4) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who determines ease in life. **12:1d**

God determines who has an easy life and who does not have an easy life.

(Observation #5) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who plants all people into existence.
12:2a

God determines who is planted here in life on earth. He causes people to come into existence.

(Observation #6) - He has permitted ungodly people to grow and produce fruit. **12:2b**

God is the One who permits fruit to be born among the good and the evil.

(Observation #7) - He listens to everything these evil people say. **12:2c**

He hears what they are saying, most of which is contrary to His word.

(Observation #8) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who knows the minds of people.
12:2b

God knows how people think and what people think. He knows they do not fear Him.

(Observation #9) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who knows His faithful people.
12:3a

God Personally knows His people and He knows who is faithful.

(Observation #10) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who sees His faithful people.
12:3b

(Observation #11) - He identifies God as the Sovereign God who examines hearts of His Faithful People in their attitudes toward Him. **12:3c**

Jeremiah is praying with an awesome view of the sovereignty of God.

In **verse 1**, Jeremiah begins by acknowledging that God is a righteous God and that he would like to begin by discussing matters that have to do with justice with God. Jeremiah wants some answers.

What Jeremiah wants to know is why do wicked people exist and prosper and why do those who are treacherous seem to live a life of ease? Jeremiah could not figure out why God would permit false prophets and priests and phony people to prosper and thrive while he was being treated like a “sacrificial lamb heading to slaughter.”

In **verse 2**, Jeremiah reasons that God has allowed them to exist and grow and blossom but God is far from their minds. Jeremiah believed God was responsible for the very life and existence of these godless, wicked people. This was very troubling to Jeremiah. God had actually planted these kinds of people into existence and they seemed to take root and take off and prosper.

They have religious talk and people seem to listen to them and support them but they do not know God. They never think about God or His word and they don't care about God in any decisions they make.

The word of God says that God blesses those who obey and are faithful and He curses those who disobey and are not faithful, and Jeremiah was looking around and it appeared to him that the opposite was happening.

In fact, in **verse 3**, Jeremiah says that God knows him. God sees him. God had tested his heart and mind. God saw that Jeremiah has a heart that cares about God and His word. He saw that Jeremiah was faithful to Him.

Jeremiah knew what should be done to these evil people. In his mind he knew what was just and right. They were God's enemies. So Jeremiah asks God why don't you drag them off like sheep for slaughter? Why don't you set them apart for a day of carnage?

In **verse 4**, Jeremiah wonders how long God will allow the Promised Land of His people to be barren? God's own people who did love Him were not thriving. How long was this going to be?

God's people were suffering and these wicked people were prospering. The land was not producing and there was not much vegetation and the wicked people had even taken their animals and birds.

According to the end of **verse 4**, these people didn't even believe that Jeremiah would live long enough to see their latter end. Godly people were dropping like flies and the wicked just lived on and on.

Jeremiah felt like it was time for God to start destroying the evil people and drag them off to be slaughtered. They are the ones who should be slaughtered and not Jeremiah.

PRAYER PART #2 – The answers of God to the prayer of Jeremiah. **12:5-17**

God gives two answers to Jeremiah:

Answer #1 - God explains what life is like for godly Jeremiah. **12:5-6**

God's first answer to Jeremiah was not what he expected. **Instead of addressing the matter of what was going on with the wicked, He decides to address what was going on with Jeremiah.**

God does not initially answer Jeremiah's question about the prosperity of the wicked. In fact, what God does is actually focus on Jeremiah. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said Jeremiah was asking "How can I get out of this?" and he should have been asking "What can I get out of this?" (*Be Decisive*, p. 72).

In **verse 5-6**, God reveals three important realities that Jeremiah needed to know about life and ministry:

(Reality #1) - The life for one godly is like running a long, tiring race. **12:5a**

When you live in this world, it is tiring and draining. It is a long haul especially if you are right with God. Footmen tire you out but if you are tired out when up against footmen, what do you think will happen when you are up against horses?

The point of this is that God uses things in this world to get His people into shape. The race is long and tiring and you don't want to give up when you are in the early stages of training because you are being trained to win at the highest level, a race against horses. This could be a reference to the Tribulation horses, when God starts turning up the heat during the Tribulation wrath with the seal judgments.

(Reality #2) - The life for one godly becomes harder, not easier. **12:5b**

Then, as life goes on, it gets harder because you are now competing with horses. The competition gets stronger and tougher as the race goes on. You do not want to get weaker in the race, but stronger in the race. God wants His people developing in trials, not deteriorating.

If you fall down when things are at peace, think about how tough it is when things are like a thicket. If God's people fall apart when things are relatively good for them, how will they do when things get difficult?

(Reality #3) - The life for one godly is a life of opposition. **12:6**

If you are right with God in this world, there will be opposition. Opposition may come from one's own family. When you are right with God, you will experience negative betrayals and some of those betrayals will come from those close to you.

What this proves when they turn against you is that they are not right with God, and ultimately their betrayal will lead to their judgment.

Family members who are against you may say nice things to one godly, but don't believe them because they are not an ally. God is warning Jeremiah not to believe the vain philosophies of this world, even family members; he needed to stay faithful to God.

God says Jeremiah you need to continue to get stronger in your relationship with Me and these difficulties will help accomplish that. You stand for what is right anyway.

Answer #2 - God explains what He is doing with His own people. **12:7-13**

Now God gets at the heart of Jeremiah's question. Jeremiah wanted to know why wicked people prospered so God gives him answers and the answer is because I have turned away from the vast majority of My own people. In Jeremiah 30:11-15, God makes it clear that when iniquity reaches a great level and sins reach a numerous level, He allows horrible, chastening punishment to hit His own people:

(Reality #1) - I have forsaken My people. **12:7a** - (azab) - to leave or forsake in sense of putting a stop to the relationship, support and blessings
(William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 617).

(Reality #2) - I have abandoned My people. **12:7b** - (natash) - to desert and leave all alone
(*Ibid.*, p. 547).

The words used in Hebrews 13:5 are some of the same words used here. In fact, the Septuagint translates these same Hebrew words into the same Greek words. If we carefully analyze the context of Hebrews 13:4-6, the context is a promise to those who are not fornicators, adulterers and idolaters who love money. If a person's character is free from these things then there is no possible way that God will ever desert or forsake His people. This is exactly the point here in Jeremiah. His people refused to turn from their evil so God forsook and abandoned them.

(Reality #3) - I have allowed My people to be dominated by enemies. **12:7d**

(Reality #4) - I have come to the point where I hate My people. **12:8**

God's love for His people had been turned to hate against His people because they had so turned away from Him.

(Reality #5) - I have permitted My people to become people of prey and called beasts to devour them. **12:9**

The words “speckled bird of prey” are words that describe a colorful bird. So God permitted His people to stand out not as some camouflaged people, but out in the open visibly so beasts could spot them and devour them.

(Reality #6) - I have permitted many shepherds to ruin and trample down My people. **12:10**

God has allowed false prophets and teachers and leaders to surface and ruin His people and lead them away from His truth and blessings.

(Reality #7) - I have made My people a desolation because no man responds in heart. **12:11**

God has permitted one negative thing after another to hit His people because His people never respond in their hearts to get right with Him.

(Reality #8) - I have brought a sword against My own people. **12:12**

Although God was using people not right with God to punish His people, it was His sword. This was the “Sword of the LORD.”

(Reality #9) - I am fiercely angry with My people. **12:13**

God’s people did not change. They were not ashamed of anything. Even the fierce anger of God did not cause them to repent and turn to Him. So everything in their life would be thorns.

(Reality #10) - I am going to use wicked people to uproot My people. **12:14**

This is fascinating because God identifies Himself with His people by calling the wicked nations “My wicked neighbors.” Even though God would use godless, wicked nations to punish His own people, He would also eventually punish them. They, too, would experience God’s judgment.

(Reality #11) - I will eventually bring some people back to their inheritance. **12:15**

Eventually, God would bring some of the people who got right with Him that He used to punish His own people, back to their lands.

(Reality #12) - I will bless people if they learn their lesson and act and speak as My people. **12:16**

If the wicked nations would respond to the ways of the people of God and family of God, and if they will turn to worship the true God, they, too, will be blessed.

(Reality #13) - I will uproot them again if they do not listen. **12:17**

Now Jeremiah's question was why do the wicked prosper? Here is the answer: **God uses them as a tool to punish His own people because His own people are not faithful to Him.**

Any nation who will purpose to turn from evil and turn to God will be the recipient of the blessings of God.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1) When the faithful believer sees the godless prosper, he will either get stronger in his faith and race or he will get weaker in his faith and race. God uses this very issue to strengthen and develop the faith of His people.**
- 2) When God's people are experiencing negative things to the point that it appears as if God has abandoned His people, it is because He is angry with the direction of His people.**
- 3) Those who are faithful to God will always be blessed and those who are not will eventually be destroyed.**