

## **Jeremiah 12:1-6, Psalms 73 + 10: Why Do the Wicked Prosper?**

I have a question burning in my mind. I wake up at 5:00am thinking about it. I've been pondering it because of recent events.

I have the same question or complaint as Jeremiah, the "Weeping Prophet" of the OT: **Jeremiah 12:1:**

*Righteous are you, O Lord,  
when I complain to you;  
yet I would plead my case before you.  
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?  
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?*

Why do the wicked prosper?

Job questioned and stated it as a fact: **Job 21:7-9:**

*Why do the wicked continue to live,  
growing old and becoming powerful?  
Their children are established while they are still alive,  
and their descendants, before their eyes.  
Their homes are secure and free of fear;  
no rod from God strikes them.*

David observed the wicked prospering: **Psalms 10:4-5:**

*In all his scheming, the wicked arrogantly thinks:  
"There is no accountability, since God does not exist."  
Why has the wicked person despised God?  
He says to himself, "You will not demand an account."  
His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are out of his sight.*

Let's see what Jeremiah wrote about God and prosperity of the wicked.

**Jeremiah 12:2-4:**

*You plant them, and they take root;  
they grow and produce fruit;  
you are near in their mouth  
and far from their heart.  
But you, O Lord, know me;  
you see me, and test my heart toward you.  
Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,  
and set them apart for the day of slaughter.  
How long will the land mourn  
and the grass of every field wither?  
For the evil of those who dwell in it  
the beasts and the birds are swept away,  
because they said, "He will not see our latter end."*

God plants the wicked and they take root, but God is not responsible for the wicked fruit they produce.

God may be on their lips, but God is far from their hearts and minds.

They may put a hand on a Bible and swear an oath "to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America... so help me GOD," but God is far from their hearts and minds. They profess (God) but do not possess (His Spirit). This is proven by their actions, their wicked deeds and policies.

Jeremiah said, "You know me and you test my heart." He means that his attitude toward God when he asked the question "Why do the wicked prosper" was not to arrogantly challenge God's righteousness or insinuate God was responsible for their wickedness. Jeremiah struggles with the fact that God is righteous and tolerates their wickedness. "How can you be a righteous God and plant them, and let them take root and produce wicked fruit? Help me to understand."

Jeremiah made a righteous request: "Set the wicked apart like sheep for the slaughter." This may seem harsh and "unchristian" but it means they will not escape God's righteous judgment.

How did God answer Jeremiah's complaint?

Read Jeremiah 12:5-6:

*If you have raced with runners  
and they have worn you out,  
how can you compete with horses?  
If you stumble in a peaceful land,  
what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?  
Even your brothers—your own father's household—  
even they were treacherous to you;  
even they have cried out loudly after you.  
Do not have confidence in them,  
though they speak well of you.*

I'm not happy with God's answer. To understand God's answer, go back to the end of chapter 11 (11:21-23). God called Jeremiah to serve as a prophet as a teenager (Jeremiah 1). The people of Jeremiah's town Anathoth and even his own family wanted to kill him because he was prophesying judgement and destruction. God called him to warn all of Judah and Jerusalem. God was saying, "If you cannot handle the small challenge I have given you, then how will you handle the bigger challenge? If you cannot deal with the opposition from your hometown Anathoth, then how will you handle the opposition from Jerusalem?" (If you cannot handle a little criticism now, then how will you handle the constant criticism and censorship from mainstream media and BigTech?)

The questions were meant to make Jeremiah realize his weakness. Jeremiah needed to learn how to trust God and to draw on His strength in his present

challenge, in order to prepare him for the greater challenges in the future. Later on, Jeremiah would have to spend a night in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-3), confinement in a cistern (Jeremiah 38:6), and imprisonment in the court of the guard (Jeremiah 28:13). The challenges he faced in Anathoth were nothing compared to the challenges he would face later in Jerusalem.

There are at least two temptations a true Christian faces when the wicked prosper and the deceitful thrive.

There is temptation to envy the prosperity of the wicked: **Psalm 73**.

**Psalm 73:1-3, 13:** *Truly God is good to Israel,  
to those who are pure in heart.*

*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,  
my steps had nearly slipped.*

*For I was envious of the arrogant  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

*All in vain have I kept my heart clean  
and washed my hands in innocence.*

When you remain faithful to God and are persecuted for it, it is very tempting to envy the prosperity of the wicked and do what they do. The wicked live by worldly wisdom; for example, "The end justifies the means." This means the wicked will become lawless; that is, they will break laws in order to achieve their end goal (e.g. steal an election to advance a political agenda).

Analogy: If you play a football game and your team must follow the rules, but the other team does not have to, then who will win the game? Your team gets penalties, but the other team does not. There are 13 penalties in football. No penalty for pass interference. No penalty for holding. No penalty for roughing the passer. No personal fouls. No penalty for helmet-to-helmet hits, horse-collar tackles, or face masking. The lawless team who never gets penalized for any foul play will win. It is not fair. Why even play the game unless my team can also play without rules and penalties?

Consider King Saul and David. King Saul was wicked and prospering. He played by his own rules; he was lawless. David was being persecuted, but David played fair by God's rules. David resisted the temptation to kill King Saul when he had the opportunity. It was a test of David's fear of God. David waited for God to vindicate him and judge King Saul. This is an exceedingly difficult test of faith.

There is also a temptation to believe that God is not good when the wicked prosper and you (patiently or impatiently) wait for justice.

Jeremiah's complaint begins "You are righteous, O Lord." Jeremiah does not understand how a righteous God can allow wicked men to prosper. A righteous God loves what is right and always does what is right because His character defines righteousness.

**James 1:13-15:** <sup>13</sup> *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* <sup>14</sup> *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* <sup>15</sup> *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

God cannot be tempted by evil because there is no evil in God, no evil desires, to respond to a temptation. People (WE) have sinful natures that respond to temptation; evil desires that thrive on temptation like a thirsty person drinks water; like Blaze eats her breakfast and growls at Sandie.

We must not yield to temptations to become wicked like the wicked who prosper. We must not lower our biblical standards. We must not think their worldly thoughts nor use their worldly methods to achieve worldly influence and power. Nor should we ever doubt that the righteousness and justice of God will finally prevail.

One answer I have for "Why do the wicked prosper?" is that God permits and uses wicked people and the wicked things they do to accomplish His GOOD

purposes. God's purposes are always good and never evil. Scripture affirms this: **James 1:16-18:** <sup>16</sup> *Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.* <sup>17</sup> *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* <sup>18</sup> *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

This can be a hard truth to accept: God uses wicked people and the wicked things they do to accomplish His GOOD purposes.

The Old Testament example of this truth is Pharaoh's opposition to God and the Hebrews in Egypt. Read Romans 9:14-24. God raised up Pharaoh to oppose His plan as a "vessel of wrath prepared for destruction" in order to glorify Himself. Romans 9:17-18, 22-23: *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 22-23: What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory? The Exodus glorified God.*

The New Testament example of this truth is the murder of the Son of God. God permitted the wickedness of Satan and the Jewish and Roman politicians to prosper. God permitted them to do what their wicked hearts wanted to do. When they did the wicked things they wanted to do, they were accomplishing God's good purpose. God's good purpose was hidden from them. In fact, scripture says that if they knew they were accomplishing God's purpose by doing the evil they wanted to do, then they would not have done it.

**1 Corinthians 2:6-8:** <sup>6</sup> *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.* <sup>7</sup> *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God*

*decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* Satan and his wicked human politicians did not understand God's salvation plan. They lived by the wisdom of this age and it blinded them to what God was doing by the murder of His Son. Paul amplified their wickedness by saying if they had understood God's salvation plan then they would have tried to stop it; they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Why? When they crucified the Lord of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, it was their own defeat and judgement.

While the wicked prosper and do wickedness we may not be able to discern God's purpose in permitting it.

God does not explain everything he is doing while he's doing it. Jesus tried to explain to the disciples what would happen in Jerusalem but they did not understand. In fact, Peter resisted it and tried to stop Jesus (Matthew 16:21-23). The disciples were not able to discern God's purpose in the crucifixion of Christ until the resurrection.

We must continue to trust in God: **Psalm 37:5-9.**

*Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him, and he will act.  
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,  
and your justice as the noonday.  
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;  
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,  
over the man who carries out evil devices!  
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!  
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.  
For the evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.*

[The question “Why do the wicked prosper?” applies to the new President and his VP. They are prospering even though they have broken God’s commandments: “Thou shalt not steal,” “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” and “Thou shalt not covet.” They promote the breaking of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill-murder.” They are both pro-abortion extremists who strongly support the tax-payer-funded murder of unborn children into the third trimester (28-40 weeks). They have no fear of God. Abortion is a political issue but more importantly it is a MORAL issue. This is not just about saving the lives of unborn children; it is also about sex-education materials in public schools that use “pro-choice” Planned Parenthood propaganda. The wickedness of this new administration will spread like metastasizing cancer.

But here is good news! During the 2020 election 16 pro-life women were elected to Congress! One picture has 15 and the other has 16 because Michelle Steel eventually won in CA. She’s a Korean American.

We just had Sanctity of Life Sunday January 17. (I missed it last Sunday but watched a powerful pro-life apologetic message by Dr. Frank Turek at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills, CA.) The March for Life will be in Washington DC 1/29.]

My other answer to the question “Why do the wicked prosper?” is that once they have been used to accomplish God’s good purpose, they will be held accountable and judged. The Psalmist struggled to answer the question until he went into the sanctuary of God. There he saw God’s holiness and he knew the wicked will be held accountable and judged.

**Psalm 73:16-19, 27:**

*But when I thought how to understand this,  
it seemed to me a wearisome task,  
until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then I discerned their end.*

*Truly you set them in slippery places;  
you make them fall to ruin.*

*How they are destroyed in a moment,  
swept away utterly by terrors!*

*For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;  
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.*



The only way the wicked can escape God's judgment is by repentance of their sin and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. That is what we ought to pray for.

I want to end on a positive note with **Jeremiah 29:11**. The "you" is plural and refers to Israel as a nation, the Jews as a people. Perhaps it can be applied to America.

*29:11-13: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

Many believer's take this verse personally, including me. I think that's OK. I created an image with it.

God has plans to give a future and a hope. Our future and hope is Jesus Christ. If you pray to Jesus, then he will hear you. If you repent, then he will forgive you. If you seek Jesus with a sincere heart, then you will know him.