

JEREMIAH 12: 1 You are righteous, LORD, when I contend with you; yet I would reason the cause with you: why does the way of the wicked prosper? why are all they at ease who deal very treacherously?

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This chapter is connected with the foregoing. The prophet expostulates with God concerning the ways of Providence in permitting the wicked to prosper, Jer 12:1-4. It is intimated to him that he must endure still greater trials, Jer 12:5, from his false and deceitful brethren, Jer 12:6; but that still heavier judgments awaited the nation for their crimes, Jer 12:7-13. That God, however, would at length have compassion on them; restore them to their land; and turn his judgments against those that oppressed them, if not prevented by their becoming converts to the true religion, Jer 12:14-17.

Verse 1

Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee - The prophet was grieved at the prosperity of the wicked; and he wonders how, consistently with God's righteousness, vice should often be in affluence, and piety in suffering and poverty. He knows that God is righteous, that every thing is done well; but he wishes to inquire how these apparently unequal and undeserved lots take place. On this subject he wishes to reason with God, that he may receive instruction.

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JEREMIAH 12: 2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they produce fruit: you are near in their mouth, and far from their heart.

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Verse 2

Thou art near in their mouth - They have no sincerity: they have something of the form of religion, but nothing of its power.

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JEREMIAH 12: 3 But you, LORD, know me; you see me, and try my heart toward you: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

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Verse 3

But thou, O Lord, knowest me - I know that the very secrets of my heart are known to thee; and I am glad of it, for thou knowest that my heart is towards thee - is upright and sincere.

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JEREMIAH 12: 4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the whole country wither? for the wickedness of those who dwell therein, the animals are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our latter end.

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Verse 4

How long shall the land mourn - These hypocrites and open sinners are a curse to the country; pull them out, Lord, that the land may be delivered of that which is the cause of its desolation.

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JEREMIAH 12: 5 If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? and though in a land of peace you are secure, yet how will you do in the pride of the Jordan?

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Verse 5

If thou hast run with the footmen - If the smallest evils to which thou art exposed cause thee to make so many bitter complaints, how wilt thou feel when, in the course of thy prophetic ministry, thou shalt be exposed to much greater, from enemies much more powerful? Footmen may here be the symbol of common evil events; horsemen, of evils much more terrible. If thou have sunk under small difficulties, what wilt thou do when great ones come?

And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst - I believe the meaning is this, "If in a country now enjoying peace thou scarcely thinkest thyself in safety, what wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan? in the time when the enemy, like an overflowing torrent, shall deluge every part of the land?"

The overflowing of Jordan, which generally happened in harvest, drove the lions and other beasts of prey from their coverts among the bushes that lined its banks; who, spreading themselves through the country, made terrible havoc, slaying men, and carrying off the cattle.

Perhaps by footmen may be meant the Philistines, Edomites, etc., whose armies were composed principally of infantry; and by the horses, the Chaldeans, who had abundance of cavalry and chariots in their army. But still the words are proverbial, and the above is their meaning.

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JEREMIAH 12: 6 For even your brothers, and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have cried aloud after you: don't believe them, though they speak beautiful words to you.

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Verse 6

For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father - Thou hast none to depend on but God: even thy brethren will betray thee when they have it in their power.

Believe them not - Do not trust to them, do not commit thyself to them; they are in heart thy enemies, and will betray thee.

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JEREMIAH 12: 7 I have forsaken my house, I have cast off my heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

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Verse 7

I have forsaken mine house - I have abandoned my temple.

I have given the dearly beloved of my soul - The people once in covenant with me, and inexpressibly dear to me while faithful.

Into the hand of her enemies - This was a condition in the covenant I made with them; If they forsook me, they were to be abandoned to their enemies, and cast out of the good land I gave to their fathers.

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JEREMIAH 12: 8 My heritage has become to me as a lion in the forest: she has uttered her voice against me; therefore I have hated her.

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Verse 8

Mine heritage is unto me as a lion - The people are enraged against me; they roar like a furious lion against their God. They have proceeded to the most open acts of the most flagrant iniquity.

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JEREMIAH 12: 9 Is my heritage to me as a speckled bird of prey? are the birds of prey against her all around? Go, assemble all the animals of the field, bring them to devour.

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Verse 9

Is unto me as a speckled bird - A bird of divers colors. This is a people who have corrupted the worship of the true God with heathenish rites and ceremonies; therefore, the different nations, (see Jer 12:10; whose gods and forms of worship they have adopted shall come and spoil them. As far as you have followed the surrounding nations in their worship, so far shall they prevail over your state. Every one shall take that which is his own; and wherever he finds his own gods, he will consider the land consecrated to them, and take it as his property, because those very gods are the objects of his worship. The fable of the daw and borrowed plumes is no mean illustration of this passage.

Dahler translates the whole verse thus: -

Birds of prey! inundate with blood my heritage.

Birds of prey! come against her from all sides.

Run together in crowds, ye savage beasts!

Come to the carnage!

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JEREMIAH 12: 10 Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.

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Verse 10

Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard - My people have had many kinds of enemies which have fed upon their richest pastures; the Philistines, the Moabites, Ammonites, Assyrians, Egyptians. and now the Chaldeans.

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JEREMIAH 12: 11 They have made it a desolation; it mourns to me, being desolate; the whole land is made desolate, because no man lays it to heart.

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Verse 11

No man layeth it to heart - Notwithstanding all these desolations, from which the land every where mourns, and which are so plainly the consequences of the people's crimes, no man layeth it to heart, or considereth that these are God's judgments; and that the only way to have them removed is to repent of their sins, and turn to God with all their hearts.

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JEREMIAH 12: 12 Destroyers have come on all the bare heights in the wilderness; for the sword of the LORD devours from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh has peace.

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Verse 12

The sword of the Lord shall devour - It is the sword of the Lord that has devoured, and will devour: this is what no man layeth to heart. They think these things come in the course of events.

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JEREMIAH 12: 13 They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns; they have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing; and you shall be ashamed of your fruits, because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

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Verse 13

They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns - All their projects shall fail: none of their enterprises shall succeed. They are enemies to God, and therefore cannot have his blessing.

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JEREMIAH 12: 14 Thus says the LORD against all my evil neighbours, who touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit: behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them.

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Verse 14

Against all mine evil neighbors - All the neighboring nations who have united in desolating Judea shall be desolated in their turn: they also are wicked, and they shall be punished. If I make them executors of my justice, it is to them no proof of my approbation. God often uses one wicked nation to scourge another; and afterwards scourges the scourger by some other scourge. In some places a

felon who was condemned to be hanged is made the common hangman for the county; he himself being still under the sentence of death, -

Till soon some trusty brother of the trade

Shall do for him what he has done for others.

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JEREMIAH 12: 15 It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land.

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Verse 15

I will return, and have compassion on them - This is a promise of restoration from the captivity, and an intimation also that some of their enemies would turn to the true God with them; learn the ways of his people; that is, would abjure idols, and take Jehovah for their God; and be built in the midst of his people, that is, Jew and Gentile forming one Church of the Most High.

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JEREMIAH 12: 16 It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, As the LORD lives; even as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of my people.

JEREMIAH 12: 17 But if they will not hear, then I will pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says the LORD.

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Verse 17

I will - destroy that nation - Several of them did not obey, and are destroyed. Of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Chaldeans, not one vestige remains. The sixteenth verse is supposed to be a promise of the conversion of the Gentiles. See Eph 2:13-22.

From the thirteenth verse to the end is a different discourse, and Dahler supposes it to have been delivered in the seventh or eighth year of the reign of Jehoiakim.