

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 12

This chapter contains the prophets complaint of the prosperity of the wicked, and the Lord's answer to it; an account of the deplorable and miserable estate of the Jewish nation; and a threatening to the neighbouring nations that had used them ill; with a promise of deliverance of the Jews from them, and settlement among God's people in case of obedience. The prophet's complaint is in (^{2411B}Jeremiah 12:1,2) in which he asserts the justice of God, yet seems at a loss to reconcile it with the prosperity of the wicked; and the rather, because of their hypocrisy; and appeals to the Lord for his own sincerity and uprightness, (^{2411B}Jeremiah 12:3) and prays for the destruction of the wicked, and that the time might hasten, for whose wickedness the land was desolate, and herbs, beasts, and birds, consumed, (^{2411B}Jeremiah 12:3,4), the Lord's answer, in which he reproves him for his pusillanimity, seeing he had greater trials than those to encounter with, and instructs him how to behave towards his treacherous friends, is in (^{2411B}Jeremiah 12:5,6) the account of the miserable condition of the Jewish nation is from (^{2411F}Jeremiah 12:7-14), under the simile of a house and heritage left by the Lord, given up to enemies, and compared to a lion and a speckled bird, hateful to God, and hated by those about it, (^{2411F}Jeremiah 12:7-9) and of a vineyard destroyed and trodden down by shepherds, and made desolate, (^{2411D}Jeremiah 12:10,11) even as a wilderness through the ravage of the sword; so that what is sown upon it comes to nothing, (^{2411D}Jeremiah 12:12,13) then follows a threatening to those who had carried the people of Israel captive, with a promise to deliver the Jews out of their hands, and bring them into their own land, and settle them among the Lord's people, in case they use diligence to learn their ways, (^{2411B}Jeremiah 12:14-16), but in case of disobedience are threatened to be plucked up and utterly destroyed, (^{2411F}Jeremiah 12:17).

Ver. 1. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee*, etc.] The six first verses of this chapter properly belong to the preceding, being of the same argument, and in strict connection with the latter part of it. Jeremiah appears to be under the same temptation, on account of the prosperity of

the wicked, as Asaph was, (~~19730~~ Psalm 73:1) only he seems to have been more upon his guard, and less liable to fall by it; he sets out: with this as a first principle, an undoubted truth, that God was righteous, and could do nothing wrong and amiss, however unaccountable his providences might be to men: he did not mean, by entering the list with him, or by litigating this point, to charge him with any unrighteousness this he took for granted, and was well satisfied of, that the Lord was righteous, “though”, says he, “I plead with thee”^{f236}; so some read the words. Deuteronomy Dieu renders them interrogatively, “shall I plead with thee?” shall I dare to do it? shall I take that boldness and use that freedom with thee? I will. The Targum is the reverse,

“thou art more just, O Lord, than that I should contend before thy word:”

yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments; not of his laws, statutes, word, and ordinances, sometimes so called; but rather of his providences, which are always dispensed with equity and justice, though not always manifest; they are sometimes unsearchable and past finding out, and will bear a sober and modest inquiry into them, and debate concerning them; the people of God may take the liberty of asking questions concerning them, when they are at a loss to account for them. So the Targum,

“but I will ask a question of judgments before thee.”

The words may be rendered, “but I will speak judgments with thee”^{f237}; things that are right; that are agreeable to the word of God and sound reason; things that are consistent with the perfections of God, particularly his justice and holiness; which are founded upon equity and truth; I will produce such reasons and arguments as seem to be reasonable and just.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? or they prosper in all their ways? whatever they take in hand succeeds; they enjoy a large share of health of body; their families increase, their trade flourishes, their flocks and herds grow large and numerous, and they have great plenty of all outward blessings; and yet they are wicked men, without the fear of God, regard not him, nor his worship and ways; but walk in their own ways which they have chosen, and delight in their abominations. Some understand this, as Jarchi, of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom God had given greatness and prosperity, to destroy the house of God; but by what

follows, in the latter part of the next verse, it appears that God's professing people, the Jews, are meant, and most likely the priests at Anathoth.

Wherefore are all they happy; easy, quiet, secure, live in peace and plenty: *that deal very treacherously?* with God and men, in religions and civil affairs.

Ver. 2. *Thou hast planted them*, etc.] In the land of Canaan, fixed the bounds of their habitation, given them a firm and comfortable settlement; for all the good things, even of the wicked, come from God:

yea, they have taken root; as everything that is planted does not; but these did, though it was downwards in the earth, on which their hearts were set, and so were strengthened and established in their worldly circumstances:

they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit; but to themselves, not to God; not fruits of righteousness or good works; they grow, not in grace and holiness, but in their worldly substance; and they brought forth fruit, not such as were meet for repentance, but they had great riches, and numerous families; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions, "they produce children, and bring forth fruit." The Targum is,

"they become rich, yea, they possess substance."

Thou art near in their mouth; they often made use of the name of God, either in swearing by it, or praying to him in an external manner; they called themselves the Lord's people, and boasted of being his priests, and employed in his service; they took his covenant, and the words of his law, into their mouths, and taught them the people, and yet had no sincere regard for these things:

and far from their reins; from the affections of their hearts, and the desires of their souls; they had no true love for God, nor fear of him, nor faith in him. The Targum is,

"near are the words of thy law in their mouth, and far is thy fear from their reins."

Ver. 3. *But thou, O Lord, knowest me*, etc.] The Lord knew him before he was born, (²⁰⁰⁵Jeremiah 1:5), he knew what he designed him for, and what use he would make of him; and he knew him now, and loved him, and cared for him, as his prophet; he knew his sincerity and faithfulness, and

took notice of it, with what integrity he performed his office, and discharged his duty; and he knew that all his enemies said of him were scandal and reproach, lies and calumnies.

Thou hast seen me; his inside, his heart, and all in it; for all things are naked and open to the eyes of an omniscient God:

and tried mine heart towards thee; he had tried him by various afflictive providences, and his heart was found towards God; the affections and desires of his soul were towards him, and he remained faithful and upright before him, and not like the wicked before mentioned.

Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter; either out of the fold, or from a fat pasture; so fat sheep are plucked from the rest, in order to be killed: this shows that their riches, affluence, and plenty, served but to ripen them for ruin and destruction, and were like the fattening of sheep for slaughter; which the prophet, by this imprecation, suggests and foretells would be their case, as a righteous judgment upon them; (see ~~485~~ James 5:5).

Prepare them for the day of slaughter; or, “sanctify them”^{f238}; set them apart for it: this, doubtless, refers to the time of Jerusalem’s destruction by the Chaldeans.

Ver. 4. *How long shall the land mourn*, etc.] The land of Judea, being desolate, and bringing forth no fruit, through the long drought that had been upon it:

and the herbs of every field wither; for want of rain to come upon it:

for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? this opens the cause, the reason of this dearth; it was the wickedness of the inhabitants of it: as the whole earth was originally cursed for the sins of men, so particular countries have had the marks of God’s displeasure upon them, because of the sins of those that dwell in them. This clause, according to the accents, belongs to what follows, and may be read in connection with the next clause; either thus, “the herbs” of every field wither, I say, “because of the wickedness of the inhabitants of it, which consumes the beasts and the birds”^{f239}; that is, which wickedness is the cause not only of the withering of the grass and herbs, but of the consumption of birds and beasts: or else, by repeating the interrogation in the preceding clause,

how long shall the earth mourn, etc.;

how long, for the malice of them that dwell in it, are the beasts and the birds consumed^{f240}? the one having no grass to eat; and the other no fruit to pick, or seeds to live upon; the barrenness being so very great and general.

Because they said; the Jews, the inhabitants of the land, the wicked part of them, and which was the greater:

he shall not see our last end; either the Prophet Jeremiah, who had foretold it; but they did not believe him, that such would be their end, and that he should live to see it; or such was their atheism and infidelity, that they said God himself should not see it; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions read, “God shall not see”.

Ver. 5. *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee,* etc.] The Targum introduces the words thus,

“this is the answer which was made to Jeremiah the prophet, concerning his question; a prophet thou art, like to a man that runs with footmen, and is weary.”

Then how canst thou contend with horses? or with men on horses: the sense is, either as Kimchi gives it, thou art among men like thyself, and thou art not able to find out their secrets and their designs against thee ((see ^{<24118>}Jeremiah 11:18,19)); how shouldest thou know my secrets in the government of the world, as to the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous? be silent, and do not trouble thyself about these things: or rather, as thou hast had a conflict with the men of Anathoth, and they have been too many for thee; they have grieved and distressed thee, and have made thee weary of my work and service; and thou hast been ready to give out, and declare that thou wilt be no longer concerned therein; what wilt thou do, when thou comest to be exercised with greater and sorer trials, and shalt have to do with the king of Judah and his court, with his princes and nobles, the sanhedrim at Jerusalem, and the priests and inhabitants thereof? The Targum interprets the footmen of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and of the good things done to him; and the horses of the righteous fathers of the Jews, who run like horses to do good works, and of the much greater good reserved for them; but very improperly: much better might it be applied, as it is by some, to the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, who gave the Jews much trouble; and therefore what would they do with the Chaldean army, consisting of a large cavalry, and which

would come upon them like an impetuous stream, and overflow, as the swelling of Jordan, as follows?

and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee; if in his own native country, where he promised himself much peace, safety, and security, he met with that which ruffled and disturbed him:

then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? when it overflowed its bank, (^{CRISIS}Joshua 3:15) and may denote the pride and haughtiness of the king and princes of Judea, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the difficulties that would attend the prophet's discharge of his duty among them; and the same thing is signified by this proverbial expression as the former.

Ver. 6. *For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father*, etc.] The men of Anathoth;

even they have dealt treacherously with thee; by laying schemes, and consulting methods, to take away his life privately; his enemies were those of his own house; which is oftentimes the case of good men, and especially of such that are in public office:

yea, they have called a multitude after thee; a multitude of men, which they gathered together, and instigated to call after him in a clamorous and reproachful way: or,

they called after thee with a full voice, as the Vulgate Latin^{f241} version renders it; and which Deuteronomy Dieu approves of; they not only gathered a mob about him, and drew men after him, but they hooted him as he went along, and called aloud after him, giving him the most reproachful names they could think of:

believe them not, though they speak fair words to thee; this must be understood of some of them, who did not appear so openly against him, as to call after him, or gather a mob about him; but of such who pretended to be his friends, and to have respect for him, and yet had evil designs against him, and therefore were not to be trusted; their words were not to be believed; their company to be shunned; nor was he safe in their houses; nor was it safe for him to be with them, to eat with them, or converse with them.

Ver. 7. *I have forsaken my house*, etc.] The temple, where the Lord took up his residence, and vouchsafed his presence to his people; this was fulfilled in the first temple, when it was destroyed by the Chaldeans; and more fully in the second, when Christ took his leave of it, (^{<4138>}Matthew 23:38) and when that voice was heard in it, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, as Josephus^{f242} relates,

“let us go hence.”

So the Targum,

“I have forsaken the house of my sanctuary.”

I have left mine heritage: the people whom he had chosen for his inheritance, whom he prized and valued, took care of, and protected as such; (see ^{<4510>}Deuteronomy 32:9).

I have given the dearly beloved of my soul; whom he heartily loved and delighted in, and who were as dear to him as the apple of his eye:

into the hands of her enemies; the Chaldeans. This prophecy represents the thing as if it was already done, because of the certainty of it, and to awaken the Jews out of their lethargy and stupidity; and by the characters which the Lord gives of them it appears what ingratitude they had been guilty of, and that their ruin was owing to themselves and their sins.

Ver. 8. *Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest*, etc.] Which roars, and terrifies passengers from going that way; and which rends and tears in pieces all it meets with. This expresses the clamours of these people against God and his providences, and their rage, fierceness, and cruelty, against his prophets, sent in his name.

It crieth out against me; this is to be understood not of the cry of the oppressed through violence, for this is a cry to God, and not against him; or of idolaters to idols, as Baal’s prophets to him, in the time of their service; which senses are mentioned by Kimchi: but either of their charging God with inequality and injustice, in the ways of his providence; or their blaspheming his name, and speaking ill of his ministry

Therefore have I hated it; which he showed by leaving his house, forsaking his heritage, and delivering his people into the hands of their enemies; the reason of which was not in himself, but them; the fault was not his, but theirs; this is all to be understood of the change in the dispensation of the

divine Providence towards them; otherwise the love of God to his chosen in Christ is unchangeable; it is never turned into hatred, but remains invariably the same, as it did to those, among these people; who belonged to the election of grace; for, as the love before expressed to this people in general only respects external favours and privileges, which they were indulged with above all people; so this hatred of them signifies the taking away of such favours, and leaving them to become a prey to their enemies.

Ver. 9. *Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird*, etc.] Or, “is not mine heritage unto me as a speckled bird?”^{f243} as a bird of various colours, delightful to look at, as the peacock, so Jerom interprets it here; it was so formerly, but not so now; or as a bird of various colours, and unusual, which other birds get about, look on, hate, and peck at. Some think this refers to the motley party coloured religion the Jews had embraced, consisting of various rites and ceremonies of the Heathens; on which account they thought they looked beautiful and comely, when they were hated and rejected of God for them; but the word signifies rather to be dipped or stained, as with blood, and so denotes a bird of prey that is stained with the blood of others; a fit emblem of the cruelty of the Jews, in shedding the blood of the prophets. Some, because a word near akin to this signifies a finger, render it a “fingered bird”^{f244}; that is, a bird with talons or claws; like fingers, a ravenous bird, and it comes to the same sense as before. But the Septuagint take it, to be not a bird, but a beast, and render it by the hyena; and which Bochart^{f245} approves of, since the word in the Arabic language signifies such a creature; and Schindler observes, that [bx, with the Arabians, is the name of a creature between a wolf and a middling dog, which agrees with the hyena. The word here used, in the Talmudic^{f246} language signifies a she leopard or panther, so called from its variety of spots; and is the same, as Maimonides says^{f247}, which, in the Arabic language, is called [bxl a; with the Targumists it is used for a kind of serpents or vipers. So the valley of Tzeboim is rendered, in the Targum, the valley of vipers, (~~0138~~ 1 Samuel 13:18). And it is said^{f248}, [wbx, the word in the text,

“this is from a white drop (or seed), and yet it has three hundred and sixty five kinds of colours, according to the number of the days of a solar year.”

The birds round about are against her; or, “are not the birds round about against her?” the birds of prey? they are; meaning the neighbouring nations,

that under Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem to take and destroy it.

Come ye, assemble all ye beasts of the field, come to devour; this is an invitation to the enemies of the people of the Jews, comparable for their fierceness and savageness to the beasts of the field, to come and destroy them; and shows that their destruction was by divine permission, and according to the will of God. Compare with this (~~6698~~ Revelation 19:18). The Targum interprets it of those that kill with the sword; kings of the earth, and their armies.

Ver. 10. *Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard*, etc.] This is a metaphor which is often used of the people of Israel and Judah; (see ~~4808~~ Psalm 80:8 ~~2308~~ Isaiah 5:1-7 27:2), the pastors that destroyed them are not their own governors, civil or religious, but Heathen princes, Nebuchadnezzar and his generals. So the Targum paraphrases it,

“many kings slay my people;”

so Kimchi and Ben Melech.

They have trodden my portion under foot; the people of the Jews, that were his portion, and before called his heritage; whom the Chaldeans subdued, and reduced to extreme servitude and bondage; and were as the dirt under their feet, greatly oppressed and despised.

They have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness; by pulling down stately edifices, unwalling of towers, and destroying men; so that there were none to manure the fields, to dress the vineyards, and keep gardens and orchards in good case; but all were come to ruin and what before was a delightful paradise was now like an heath or desert.

Ver. 11. *They have made it desolate*, etc.] Which is repeated to denote the certainty of it; astonishment at it, and that it might be observed:

and being desolate it mourneth unto me; not the inhabitants of it for their sins, the cause of this desolation; but the land itself, because of the calamities upon it; it crying to God, in its way, for a restoration to its former beauty and glory.

The whole land is made desolate; it was not only the case of Jerusalem, and the parts adjacent, but even of the whole land of Judea:

because no man layeth it to heart, took any notice of the judgment threatened, foretold by the prophets; nor repented of their sins, for which they were threatened with such a desolation; nor even were properly affected with the destruction itself; the earth seemed more sensible of it than they were; this expresses the great stupidity of this people.

Ver. 12. *The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness*, etc.] Of Judea; or which lay between Chaldea and Judea, through which the Chaldean army came; called here the “spoilers”, because they spoiled and plundered all places where they came; nor could the high, strong, and fortified places withstand them, or escape their ravage and fury. Deuteronomy Dieu renders it, “upon all the plains in the wilderness”; where was pasture, land for cattle, as Kimchi serves; which were trodden down and spoiled by the soldiers, and made forage of.

For the sword of the Lord shall devour from the one end; of the land even the other end of the land; the sword of the Chaldeans is called the sword of the Lord, because it was drawn by his order and appointment, and was succeeded by him to do execution; and the calamity which it brought upon the land reached from one end of it to the other, so general and; extensive it was.

No flesh shall have peace; no inhabitant of Judea shall be in safety, but be exposed to the sword, or to captivity.

Ver. 13. *They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns*, etc.] Which may be understood literally, the land of Judea being cursed for their sins, and become barren and unfruitful, as the earth originally was for the sin of the first man, (²⁰⁰⁸⁹Genesis 3:19), or rather figuratively, which some interpret of the prophets as Kimchi, sowing the good seed of the word among the Jews; but it did not take place in them, and bring forth fruit; instead thereof thorns sprung up, or evil works were done by them, comparable thereunto; but it seems better to understand it of the people; not, as Jarchi, of their prayers, which were not accepted, because unattended with repentance and good works; but of their schemes, which they thought were prudently laid, in forming an alliance with Egypt, and sending thither for help against the Chaldeans, but all in vain; these proved in the issue like thorns, grievous and vexatious to them. The Septuagint version reads imperatively, “sow ye”: and Jarchi makes mention of a copy, in which the word was pointed as to be so read, as in (²⁸¹⁰²Hosea 10:12), and may be understood ironically. The Targum is,

“be ye not like those who sow wheat in untilled land, and can gather nothing but thorns.”

They have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit; were at a great deal of pains and trouble to make Egypt their ally, and send thither for assistance, and all to no purpose. Kimchi’s father interprets this of their uneasiness and grief, at parting with so much money to the king of Egypt, without having any advantage by it; which is to be preferred to the sense Jarchi gives, of the people crying to God, and grieving because not regarded by him. Some render the words, “they have got an inheritance”, as the Vulgate Latin; the land of Canaan, but they will not be able to keep it; it shall no longer be theirs, or any advantage to them.

And they shall be ashamed of your revenues; not the prophets of the evil works of the people, but rather the people of their own evil works; and, particularly, of their schemes, counsels, and preparations, to secure themselves against the enemy; of their alliances with other nations, and of vain confidences; the success not answering to the pains and expense they had been at; but these failing and disappointing them, would fill them with shame and confusion.

Because of the fierce anger of the Lord; against which there was no standing; this being infinitely more powerful than the Chaldean army, by the means of which it came upon them, and from which no schemes and alliances could protect them.

Ver. 14. *Thus saith the Lord against all mine evil neighbours*, etc.] Or, “concerning”^{f249} them; the Egyptians, Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Tyre, and Sidon; whom the Lord calls his “neighbours”, because they were near the land of Canaan, where his people dwelt, to whom he vouchsafed his presence, and where the temple was in which he took up his residence; and his “evil” neighbours, because they often distressed and afflicted his people.

That touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; meaning not only that they bordered on the land of Canaan, and so might be said to touch it, but that they did hurt unto it; in which sense the word touch is used, (^{CRASIS} Psalm 105:15), the land of Canaan was an inheritance which was distributed by lot to the children of Israel, who were a people dear unto the Lord, as this shows; and therefore they that touched

them, or their inheritance, as to do them any harm, touched the apple of his eye, and which he resented greatly, (^{<3018>}Zechariah 2:8).

Behold, I will pluck them out of their land; cause them to be carried captive into other lands, or be destroyed in their own; see Jeremiah chapters forty six through forty nine: and pluck out the house of Judah from among them; such of the Jews they had formerly carried captive, or who had fled to them upon the Chaldean invasion; these the Lord would cause to come forth from among them, and return them to their own land.

Ver. 15. *And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out,* etc.] Not the Jews only, but more especially their neighbouring nations; after they have been plucked up and carried captive, and been in captivity some time:

I will return, and have compassion on them; or, “have compassion on them again”^{f250}; by returning their captivity, as is promised, (^{<2487>}Jeremiah 48:47 49:6,39):

and I will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land; this seems to respect the conversion of the Gentiles in the latter day, when the fulness of them shall be brought in; as the latter part of the preceding verse may more especially regard the conversion of the Jews at the same time, when they shall be gathered out of all nations where they are, and return to their own land.

Ver. 16. *And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people,* etc.] Not their evil ways of sin or superstition, they sometimes stray into; but the ways which God has prescribed to them, and has directed them to walk in, and in which they do walk; and which are to be learned of the Lord, by a diligent attendance with his people on his word and ordinances; (see ^{<2018>}Isaiah 2:3):

to swear by my name, the Lord liveth; that is, to worship and serve the living God, a self-existent Being, who has life in himself, and of himself, and not another; and is the fountain, author, and giver of natural life to all creatures, and spiritual and eternal life to his true worshippers: swearing is here put for the whole of religious worship, as in (^{<1613>}Deuteronomy 6:13):

(as they taught my people to swear by Baal;) to worship him, and other idols:

then shall they be built in the midst of my people; become part of the spiritual building the church; being laid upon the same foundation of the apostles and prophets, and built up a holy temple; a spiritual house for the Lord to dwell in; partaking of the same privileges and ordinances as the people of God; being fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the Gospel, (^{<4020>}Ephesians 2:20,21 3:6), it denotes the settlement and establishment of the Gentiles with the Jews in a Gospel church state. So the Targum,

“and they shall be established in the midst of my people.”

Ver. 17. *But if they will not obey*, etc.] Or “hear”^{f251}; the word of the Lord, and hearken to the ministers of the Gospel, and be subject to the ordinances of it; or as the Targum,

“will not receive instruction:”

I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord: root it up from being a nation, strip it of all its privileges and enjoyments, and destroy it with an everlasting destruction; (see ^{<3346>}Zechariah 14:16-18).