

# Why do the wicked prosper

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[ 0 : 00 ] We shall now turn to the passage of scripture which we read together, the prophecy of Jeremiah. And we shall read again, chapter 12 and verse 1.

Jeremiah chapter 12 and verse 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?

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

How often this question is asked. Why do the wicked prosper? Why do evil men get off with it?

[ 1 : 04 ] Why is there so much suffering in the world? You'll meet it if you go around witnessing door-to-door work or speaking to people in the streets or even often speaking to a neighbour.

And they'll say to you, where's the justice of God? How can God allow poor people to die of famine in Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan?

How can God allow an earthquake to devastate a large area and destroy so many lives as in Armenia?

How can God allow a plane crash such as we had at Lockerbie? Where's the justice? Where's God?

Why does he allow it? And why do the perpetrators of such violence seem so often to get off with it?

[ 2 : 06 ] Some people abuse children and horribly abuse them. Day after day we read these things in our newspapers and are appalled at it.

Why does God allow it? Old women are mugged. How can God let that continue?

Crooks and frauds seem to become rich. Evil men prosper. Why? One old lady that I met recently in door-to-door work said to me, I can't believe in God.

God, I've got a lovely daughter. A really fine girl. Good living, moral, upright. Really kind, wouldn't hurt anybody.

Fine, fine person. She had a child recently and that child is mentally subnormal. I can't accept this.

[ 3 : 16 ] There's something wrong. Other people have children. Wicked people, they are given perfectly healthy children. And then they misuse them. They treat them so cruelly.

How can God allow this? Where is God? Where is God? Where is the justice of God in all this?

Maybe you tonight are asking the same question.

Maybe some trouble has come your way. Maybe some distress. Some bereavement. Some sickness. Maybe you've lost your job.

Maybe you've failed some exam or some interview or whatever it might be. Different things can happen.

Maybe your husband, your wife has walked out on you. Maybe your girlfriend, boyfriend has left you. And you're wondering, where's God? Where's justice?

[ 4 : 15 ] Where can I turn? Maybe the question is arising in your heart. Is there really a God?

Jeremiah, in the passage in front of us, which is a very frank passage, complains against God. He's perplexed. He's perplexed. He's troubled. Yes, he says, righteous art thou, O Lord. You're righteous.

You're just. He believes in God. And he asserts his belief in God. But then he says, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.

Wherefore, wherefore, doth the wicked prosper? Wherefore, are all they happy that deal very treacherously? It's a good question for us to look at, to consider.

[ 5 : 23 ] Even if it's not a question that's bothering you just now, it's an important one to study. Because as you talk to people about their souls and their need to become Christians and bow the knee to King Jesus, they will raise this question.

And you've got to be able to talk about it. To try and answer it. The first thing that I would like to emphasize tonight is that the wicked do indeed prosper.

There's no use in trying to pretend that the wicked don't prosper. They do. There's no getting away from it.

Some men, some evil men and evil women seem to get on really well. God revealed this to Jeremiah. The men of Anathoth were secretly plotting to kill him.

Chapter 12, verse 6. They spoke fair words to Jeremiah. Fair, flattering words. Oh, you're a good man. You're a great prophet. You're a man of God.

[ 6 : 37 ] You say a lot of good things. You're a holy man. You're a great man. They spoke fair words to him. But at the same time were secretly plotting to kill him.

The very people that he loved. The people amongst whom he had been born and bred. The people amongst whom he had grown up.

His friends, his relatives, those closest to him. Those that he regarded as his people. His home. They were plotting to kill him.

They weren't just plotting to hurt him a little. But as chapter 11, verse 19 says, they were intending to cut the tree down with its fruit.

The complete destruction of Jeremiah. Cut him down in his youth. Cut him down. The tree and its fruit.

[ 7 : 40 ] Jeremiah had spoken God's word to them. He had condemned their idolatry. Told them of how evil it was to be bowing down to Baal and raising altars at the corner of every street to these false gods.

He had pronounced God's judgment upon them. Told them of the Chaldeans who were going to come and devastate their land and take them away into bondage to Babylon if they would not repent.

They regard him as a traitor. Somebody who's on the side of their enemies. Somebody who's weakening their hands and their resolution to fight. They were hypocrites.

Chapter 12, verse 2. God was near in their mouth, but far from their reins. God was in their mouth. Yes, they spoke a lot about God.

How they believed in Jehovah. How they were followers of Jehovah and God's people. But God was far from their hearts. So easy to be a hypocrite.

[ 8 : 58 ] Maybe some of you are hypocrites. Talking about God. Ready to talk about these things. But yet in your heart. Far from God.

Hypocrisy. It's one of the sins which is greatly condemned in scripture. Particularly by our Lord Jesus himself.

And yet these evil people. Plotting to destroy Jeremiah. Hypocrites. Idolaters. They were prospering. Jeremiah says in verse 2.

Thou hast planted them. God it would seem had planted them. Yes, they had taken root. They were growing and bringing forth fruit.

These words remind us of Psalm 1. The blessed man. The happy man. He shall be like a tree that grows near planted by a river.

[ 10 : 00 ] Which in her season yields his fruit. And his leaf fadeth never. And all he doth shall prosper well. The wicked are not so. But they are likened to the chaff.

Which wind drives to and fro. The very same language is used here. But the strange thing is. That it's used the other way round. In Psalm 1.

The godly man. He is the one who is like a tree planted by the river. Growing. Flourishing. The leaf of the tree never fading. Bearing fruit.

And the wicked were the ones who were like the chaff. Blown away with the wind. But Jeremiah tells us it's the other way round in reality.

The wicked are like a tree planted by God and flourishing. And the godly are like the chaff. Cut down in the middle of their days and blown away.

[ 10 : 57 ] Psalm 55 verse 23. The bloody man. The man of violence. He shall not live half his days.

But poor Jeremiah. He's thinking of himself. He's tried to serve the Lord. He's tried to be faithful. He's tried to stand out on God's side. He's said everything that God has told him to say. He hasn't accompanied with the wicked. He hasn't followed them in their evil ways. He hasn't been involved in idolatry. And yet. Jeremiah. He feels he's gone. He's not going to live half his days. He's going to be cut down. Because of the plotting. Of the evil men. All of us know evil people who have grown old. And we know good people who die young. We can see in the New Testament some examples. Think for example of Stephen.

[12:03] What a godly man. A man full of faith. And of the Holy Ghost. It's a wonderful description that we're given here.

Of that man Stephen. A man full of power and of the Holy Ghost. A man whose face shone like the face of an angel. A man who in his youth and his prime.

Was mightily convincing the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. A man of great usefulness. A godly man. A gifted man.

A useful man. A man who was serving the Lord with his whole heart. And the mob assassinated him. They stoned him to death. Why?

Where's God? Why did God allow it? Or think of James the son of Zebedee. One of the three closest disciples to Christ.

[13:02] Peter, James and John. As a young man. Executed by Herod. Why does God allow it?

Where is your justice God? Or think of Paul. Such a godly man. Such a faithful man.

Spending and being spent for Jesus. Going about from place to place. Never weary. Never growing tired. Laboring from Jerusalem to Rome.

With the care of all the churches. Doing so much good work. Preaching day and night. In all kinds of dangers. Faithful to the Lord.

And yet. Think of all that Paul suffered. Think of all the troubles that came upon him. Think of the beatings that he had to endure. And the shipwrecks. And eventually execution.

[14:02] At the hand of the Roman authorities. Why? Where's justice? And then we think of evil men.

Think of somebody. Who died just recently. Emperor Hirohito. Of Japan. Man.

Who when he began his reign. Was worshipped as God. Accepting worship. As if he was God. Taking God's place. A man who presided.

Over one of the most cruel. And tyrannical. Of regimes. A government. That massacred.

Massacred so many. Innocent people. A government that was involved. In the horrible torture. Of so many prisoners of war. So barbarous.

[15:08] So cruel. So wicked. And this man at the top. At the hill. Does he die young? He lives.

To ripe. Old age. Why? Why? Where is justice? You know examples.

In your own experience. You can think of good people. You've died young. You've had many troubles. You can think of evil people. Rich. Prosperous.

Living on to old age. Seeming to have no troubles. Else. Maybe this question is bothering you. Maybe you're asking yourself.

Can there in the highest be. Knowledge. Of things below. Does God know. What is taking place.

[16:06] Does God see. What is going on. God. Maybe you're beginning to wonder. Is there a God.

Maybe like. Job. Of old. You're asking. Oh. That I knew. Where I might. Find him. Oh. That I knew. Where I might. Find him. So that I could go. And. And tell him this. And talk to him. And reason with him. So as to get things sorted out.

The wicked prosper. Yes. The wicked do prosper. So that leads us to our second point. Why does the wicked prosper?

Why does God allow this? Wherefore does the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy?

[17:12] That deal. Very treacherously. Now what is the answer. That God gives to Jeremiah. In this passage. It's a very strange answer.

It occurs in verse 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 swellings of Jordan? Run. If in the foot race.

You're getting tired. Running against. Runners. How are you going to find it possible for you to race against horses?

You on your feet. Running against horses. If you're growing tired. And running against men. If in the land of peace.

[18:13] And the day is coming Jeremiah. When you look back on today. And you'll call it a day of peace. If in the land of peace. You're wearied and troubled. How will you do in the thickets of Jordan?

How will you do? In that place. Where the lions have their dens. Where the robbers and the violent men lurk.

If in the land of peace you're in trouble. How will you do in the thickets of Jordan? What's God saying to Jeremiah? He's saying Jeremiah.

If you're finding things hard at present. You're going to find them an awful lot harder in the future. A strange answer. For the perplexed prophet.

What can we say? Well there are various points that we must gather from this. First. The first thing that we must understand is.

[19:17] The mystery of God's dealings. With this world. His ways are higher than our ways.

His thoughts than our thoughts. We like things to be black and white. We like everything to be obvious. It suits our simple minds. But God's not like that.

God's infinite. God's great. He's wise. So tremendously wise. That his mind doesn't work.

As our little minds work. Those whose blood Pilate mingled with our sacrifices.

The Galileans. Were they greater sinners than all other Galileans? Asks Jesus. Those on whom. The fourteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell.

[20:20] Were they the greatest sinners in Jerusalem? The people of that day thought they were. And that's why this judgment had come upon them.

You remember how it was with Job. He lost everything. He lost his wealth. His prosperity. His flocks. His herds. His asses.

His camels. In one day. He lost his family. And then he lost his health. And his wife. She was saying curse God and die. And his three friends came to see him.

And they were saying to him. Job you're in a bad way. Job terrible disasters have come upon you. Job.

We're sure you've done something really wicked. If you hadn't done something really wicked. You wouldn't be in such a bad way. You see.

[21:18] The simple way they were arguing. But it wasn't true. At the end of the day. Job had to pray. Pray. For his comforters. That God would forgive them.

For the bad testimony. The bad argument. That they had been putting forward. You remember that this was current even.

Amongst. Those people who had no contact. With Jehovah. Or with Israel. When Paul was. Shipwrecked. At Malta.

The barbarous people. The non-Greek. Speaking people. Of the island. You remember. Made a fire for. The shipwrecked. Seamen. And prisoners.

And Paul was helping. Gathered some sticks. And as he was putting. The sticks into the fire. A serpent came out. And clung to his hand. The people. And the people.

[22:16] The natives of the island. Looking on said. Aha. Here's a man. Who's obviously a murderer. Obviously an evil man.

He managed to escape. Out of the sea. But vengeance has caught up with him. He's going to die.

And they expected. Paul to fall down dead. You see the way they were reasoning. If you sin. You will die. If you don't sin. If you're a good person. You will live.

It's natural reasoning. But it's not right. It's not true. There's a mystery. In God's ways of dealing. Yes. Sometimes. It seems. That the wicked are prospering. That God has planted them. That they have taken root. And they're growing. And bearing fruit.

[23:14] There's a mystery. In all this. The second point. We must make is. That whatever we see. Whatever we think. Whatever we feel.

We must confess. That God is righteous. Righteous art thou. O Lord. We walk. By faith.

Not by sight. And sometimes. It's hard. It's difficult. It seems almost impossible. It seems irrational. To believe in God. And yet we must.

We have to. Righteous art thou. O Lord. Think of what Jeremiah was saying. He's complaining about the righteousness of God. And yet.

By faith. He rises above his complaints. And he says. Righteous art thou. O God. Yes. I know you are righteous. And he assures his own heart.

[ 24 : 09 ] That God is righteous. And so we too. Must trust in the righteousness of God. We must assure ourselves. That God is righteous.

We must trust him. We must leave God to run the world. He knows best. We must. We mustn't try to take vengeance. Vengeance belongeth unto me.

I will repay. Saith the Lord. It's not for us. To take vengeance. That's God's job. We must confess that he is righteous.

Leave him to run the world. Let's not all. Let's not get all worked up and bothered. About trying to sort things out. Leave it in God's hands.

Third point. God is long suffering. Eventually these wicked men of Anathoth. Were punished.

[ 25 : 12 ] Chapter 11 verse 22 tells us. Therefore thus saith the Lord. Behold I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword. Their sons and their daughters shall die by famine.

And there shall be no remnant of them. For I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth. Even the year of their visitation. The young men would die by the sword. The boys and girls would be killed by famine.

So judgment would eventually come upon the men of Anathoth. But God is long suffering. God waits for people to repent.

He gives them every chance. Every opportunity. If God were to punish us immediately we sinned. We would all be in hell.

For we have all sinned. But God's long suffering. He waits for us to return. Just think of how it was in the days of Noah.

[ 26 : 15 ] God pronounced his judgment upon the ancient world. And yet before he carried out that judgment. He waited 120 years.

While Noah was building the ark. And preaching. Testifying to the people. Witnessing to them. Waited for 120 years. At the end of the 120 years.

None of them came into the ark with Noah. But God had been long suffering. He gave them that 120 years to repent. They couldn't say.

But they didn't get a chance. And so it is today. On the one hand. Yes. The New Testament tells us. Behold I come quickly.

The Lord Jesus is coming. He will soon come. And yet why does he delay? Because he is giving people opportunity. To turn. To repent. To come to him. The Lord Jesus is merciful.

[ 27 : 17 ] Our God is merciful. Long suffering. Waiting. For sinners to repent. Yes. God could come in judgment. And destroy people immediately.

They sinned. But he is so merciful. He gives us chance after chance. Opportunity after opportunity. I wonder are you testing. And tempting.

The long suffering of God. God been speaking to you. Stirring up your conscience. Making you concerned.

You've been hardening your heart. You've been saying. I want to enjoy my pleasures. I like this. Dancing, drinking, whatever it is.

Someday I'll become a Christian. And you're pushing it off. Pushing God to one side. Remember. Although God is long suffering.

[ 28 : 16 ] He won't wait forever. Remember that terrible verse. My spirit shall not always strive with man.

There comes a point. When God says. You've gone too far. You've carried on too long in unbelief. Your chances have come to an end.

Friend. Don't tempt the mercy. And long suffering of God. Repent. Seek him. While he is to be found.

Call upon him while he is near. He can't always be found. He won't always be near. But God's long suffering. Yes. He waits.

And he delays. His judgments. Giving people opportunity. To repent. And there's something else. Very closely connected. God.

[ 29 : 14 ] God. Having given up people. Fattens them.

For the day of slaughter. Jeremiah says in verse 3. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughterhouse. Pull them out from the flock. You don't pull out a skinny little sheep. You wait till the sheep is full and fat. Then you pull it out for the slaughter. And so it is with God.

An awesome and terrible thought. But it's true. God waits. Until people. Have piled up. The full mountain of their sin.

And then he cuts them down. He waits till the sinner. Has heaped up as it were. Condemnation for himself.

[ 30 : 14 ] To such an extent. That the condemnation is full. It's as it were. God's anger. Building up inside him. With each sin that the man.

The woman commits. God getting angrier and angrier. Holding it back. Until the day that it explodes. Upon the sinner.

Fattened for the day of slaughter. And so it is that you see some people. Some people. Who have apostatized. Turned their back on God.

Yes. Going on in sin. Running madly on in their foolish ways. And God leaves them. They go on further and further.

In their wickedness. In their perversion. Until the day that God. Sees that their. Their sins have reached the full measure.

[ 31 : 16 ] And his own wrath against them. Has reached the full measure too. And he cuts them down. In his anger. And so people are left.

Fattening. For the day of slaughter. What a terrible state to be in. Friend. If you're not ripening for glory.

You're fattening. For the day of slaughter. A further thought.

We need troubles. As Christians. To test our faith. Jeremiah. For his own personal good. Needed to see.

Various troubles. And sufferings. Coming his way. And then emerged. As gold. Tried and tested.

[ 32 : 25 ] In the fire. Somebody was saying to me. Just this morning. We need. Trouble.

To come to us. Sometimes. When everything's going fine. When we're healthy. Getting on with our job.

And everything fine in the family. Then. We're drifting along with a current. Swallowed up with the world. But then sickness comes along.

Trouble comes along. And suddenly. Our faith takes on a new dimension. God becomes so much more important.

We're shaken out of our complacency. And then we see the importance. Of getting things right. Between us and our God. We need troubles.

[ 33 : 21 ] In order to. Shake us out of our sleepiness. And deadness. Think of the wonderful confession. That Job made. We spoke about him earlier.

All the troubles. Which came upon him. The poverty. The loss of his health. The misery that he was suffering. His friends. And his wife. Turned against him. And everything.

Blackness round about him. Yet how wonderful. Are those words. With which Job. By faith. Is able to.

Look through. All these troubles. And to say. I know that my redeemer liveth. Great words. I know that he lives. Yes. Yes.

Yes. He lives. He will come. He will save me. I know that he lives. There's faith. That's gold. Purified in the fire. Shining forth.

[ 34 : 14 ] Bright. Burning. I know that my redeemer lives. God has to send troubles to us. Hard though it is in our experience.

Difficult for us to endure. But they are necessary. For our perfecting. And further.

These troubles correct our backslidings. And God like a parent. Chastises. Punishes us. When we go wrong. When we sin.

When we turn away. So that he will bring us back. He's a loving father. He won't let his children be spoiled. He's concerned. To bring us back.

We need troubles. Let's not. Look on trouble as something which is. Essentially evil. Let's not. All things work together for good.

[ 35 : 19 ] It's hard to believe that sometimes. How can this trouble be for my good? But it is. Whether you can understand it. Or not. If you're one of God's children.

There's not one trouble. Comes your way. Not one pain. Not one distress. But it's for your good. Everything works together for good. Every single thing. To them. To them. To them. To them who love God. To them who are the called.

According to his purpose. We need trouble. Rejoice in tribulations. Is Paul. Do the impossible. Be happy.

When everything's against you. By grace you can be. Further. Further. This world is not the final state.

[ 36 : 19 ] It is but a probation. It's but a testing time. The judgment day is ahead. Yes. It's true. There is some sorting out here.

And we do see. Sodom and Gomorrah. Destroyed for their sins. And the ancient world too. In the days of Noah. And we see Judas.

Having betrayed his Lord. He cannot go on living. He has to take away his life. But the sorting out. Really takes place in the next life.

The judgment day is ahead. Justice and righteousness. Belongs to the next world. The sorting out. Here we have all the tangle.

That is so difficult to understand. But on the judgment day. Full and perfect justice. Will be given to every man and woman.

[ 37 : 17 ] In the world. Remember the psalm we were singing. Psalm 73. Yet God is good to Israel. To each pure hearted one.

But as for me. My steps near slipped. My feet were almost gone. When I perceived the foolish folk. Enjoy prosperity. When I saw the wicked going on in their sins.

And they seemed to prosper. They were getting on so well. They were healthy. And they were wealthy. And they didn't seem to have any troubles. But they just. They were flourishing on every side.

And the man of God. Asaph. When he was looking on. And seeing the wicked. Getting on so well. His feet almost slipped. He wondered.

What's gone wrong? How can it be so? And. Then one day. Went into the temple. And suddenly it dawned on him.

[ 38 : 20 ] The end. Of the wicked. That they were indeed standing upon a slippery slope. And they could flourish well enough here.

And be prosperous. But what shall it profit a man. Though he gain the whole world. And lose his own soul. Psalm 37 says the same thing.

David there. On the one hand. Tempted to fret. And to be envious. And jealous. When he was seeing wicked people. Getting on so well. But then he thinks.

He thinks of their end. He reminds himself. Of the judgment day. Everything will be sorted out. Don't envy the wicked. Their day is coming.

Amen. And a final point. Things are often very different.

[ 39 : 22 ] To our perception of them. The grass. Often looks greener. On the other side of the fence. Let us remind ourselves.

As David does. In Psalm 37. The little that a just man hath. Is more and better far. Than all the riches of the wicked. The man of God.

Is happier with his little. Than the rich man. With his riches. How happy are the violent men. The men. Who have been engaged.

In mugging. And in. Abuse of children. And in terrorism. Etc. Tormented by their conscience. Mentally unbalanced. Some of them. How happy are they. How few of the. Really rich people. Of the world. Are happy. Despite what the glossy magazines say.

[ 40 : 28 ] Thou rich people. Are they happy. With their ulcers. Running around. Here there. Trying to make more money. Working round the clock. Chasing this pleasure.

And that pleasure. This divorce. And that divorce. No love. No security. No domestic happiness. No happy. Soul and conscience. Rushing madly around. Looking for happiness. And it's evaded them.

We look at others. And we sometimes think. What an easy life they have. Maybe we've got a far easier life.

Than they have. Perhaps a far more pleasant. Life. And if we have Christ. We certainly have a better life. The troubles that afflict.

[ 41 : 26 ] The just in number. Many be. But yet. At length. Out of them all. The Lord. Set him free. No matter what troubles. We have in this life. We've got God with us.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He leads us. Leads us. Into the green pastures. And by the still waters.

And even when we pass through. The valley of the shadows. We will fear no evil. For he is with us. His rod. His staff. They comfort us. He prepares us a table. In the presence of our enemies.

Our cup overflows. Goodness and mercy. Follow us all the days of our life. How blessed is the child of God. Why should we envy.

The wicked. Righteous art thou, O Lord. Yes. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper.

[ 42 : 23 ] Wherefore are all they happy. That deal very treacherously. Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Lord. And leave it all in his hands.

Let us pray. Amen. Gracious and ever blessed God. We pray that thou wouldst enable us.

To rejoice in the justice of God. That thou art righteous. Enable us to leave our lives in thine hands.

To cast our cares and burdens upon thee.

To be anxious for nothing. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. To let our requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Shall keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Keep us, O Lord, from envying the wicked.

And help us to rejoice. That we have God.

[ 43 : 24 ] A God who will never leave us nor forsake us. And that we have a great future.

Tremendous destiny before us. Keep us then, O God.

From being discouraged. Enable us to profit from every experience in life. And so to press on into the kingdom of heaven. Not wearying and well-doing.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.