

Jeremiah 12:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

This verse opens Jeremiah's complaint: 'Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee.' The Hebrew *tsaddiq attah* (צַדִּיק אַתָּה) affirms God's righteousness as foundation for the complaint. 'Plead with thee' (riv, contend legally) indicates formal disputation—Jeremiah brings his case to God's court. 'Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.' The prophet requests dialogue about *mishpatim* (משפטים, judgments, ordinances, ways of justice). 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' This is the perennial theodicy question—why do the unrighteous succeed? 'Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?' The 'treacherous' (bogedim) prosper while the faithful suffer. Jeremiah's complaint anticipates Psalm 73, Job, and Habakkuk.

Historical Context

This is Jeremiah's second 'confession' (12:1-6), following the Anathoth plot. Having just experienced betrayal by his hometown while faithfully proclaiming God's word, he questions why the wicked prosper. This pattern—faithful prophet suffering while apostates thrive—contradicted simple reward/punishment theology. The exile would force Israel to develop more sophisticated understanding of suffering.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does affirming God's righteousness provide foundation for questioning His ways?
2. What makes the prosperity of the wicked such a troubling theological problem?

Interlinear Text

צַדִּיק יְהִי אַתָּה כִּי יְהִי אַל יְבִיא אַל יְבִיא אַל יְבִיא

Righteous H859 **art thou O LORD** H3588 **when I plead** H7378 H413 H389

H6662

H3068

H7378

מִשְׁפָטִים אַדְבֵּר אַדְבֵּר אַתְּ נִמְדֵּע אַתְּ נִמְדֵּע

with thee of thy judgments with thee yet let me talk H854 H4069

H4941

H1696

כֵּל שָׁלֹא רְשָׁעִים צָלָה דְּרָה

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper wherefore are all they happy H3605

H1870

H7563

H6743

H7951

בְּגִדִּים בְּגִדִּים

that deal very treacherously

H899

H898

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 3:15 (Evil): And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Psalms 92:7 (Evil): When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:

Psalms 37:1 (Evil): Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

Job 12:6 (Parallel theme): The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.

Daniel 9:7 (Righteousness): O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

Psalms 37:35 (Evil): I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

Psalms 51:4 (Righteousness): Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Habakkuk 1:4 (Righteousness): Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

Jeremiah 11:20 (Righteousness): But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

Zephaniah 3:5 (Righteousness): The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.