***Jeremiah 12 Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? 2You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind. 3But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, And You have tested my heart toward You. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, And prepare them for the day of slaughter. 4How long will the land mourn, And the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, For the wickedness of those who dwell there, Because they said, “He will not see our final end.” 5“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, they wearied you, Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan? 6For even your brothers, the house of your father, Even they have dealt treacherously with you; Yes, they have called a multitude after you. Do not believe them,  
Even though they speak smooth words to you. 7“I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. 8My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; It cries out against Me; Therefore I have hated it.  
9My heritage is to Me like a speckled vulture; The vultures all around are against her. Come, assemble all the beasts of the field, Bring them to devour! 10“Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, They have trodden My portion underfoot; They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. 11They have made it desolate; Desolate, it mourns to Me; The whole land is made desolate, Because no one takes it to heart. 12The plunderers have come On all the desolate heights in the wilderness, For the sword of the Lord shall devour From one end of the land to the other end of the land; No flesh shall have peace. 13They have sown wheat but reaped thorns; They have put themselves to pain but do not profit. But be ashamed of your harvest Because of the fierce anger of the Lord.” 14Thus says the Lord: “Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit - behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. 15Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. 16And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people. 17But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation,” says the Lord.***

We’re with Jeremiah again tonight. Babylon continues to draw ever nearer and so too does the captivity of Judah. The priests and the princes continue to act wickedly, ignoring the prophets that God is sending, and leading the people deeper into idolatry. Into this, we step with Jeremiah, as Jeremiah begins to inquire of God, not accusingly, but seeking to understand what God is bringing to bear upon Judah.

Verse 1 *Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?* Jeremiah starts by reverencing and acknowledging God’s righteousness. God is just and holy in all His ways. We do well to remind ourselves often of God’s righteousness and justice. Now, in the right attitude of heart, Jeremiah asks questions – why do the wicked prosper? Why do the treacherous deal happily? These are questions that we still struggle with today. Yet, though we don’t understand, we rest assured, confident that God is just and will never wrong His children. Jeremiah now starts – Let me talk with You. He’s seeking to understand what He is witnessing. Why do the ways of the wicked prosper, or seem to succeed? Why do those dealing dishonestly seem to deal happily? Why is this permitted God? We know that God controls it all. Remember that we left Jeremiah asking God to avenge him with regards to the priests of Anathoth. Many theologians agree that the people in view in this verse are the conspirators of Anathoth from chapter 11.

Verses 2-3 *You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind. 3But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, And You have tested my heart toward You. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, And prepare them for the day of slaughter.* Jeremiah now recognizes that God has planted these men. Their prosperity is found in priestly positions, talking of God, but not knowing God in their hearts and minds. As Isaiah 29:13 said, “*They honor God with their mouth, but their hearts are far from Him.*” But God knows Jeremiah in a different way. He knows that Jeremiah knows God in heart and mind. He is obedient, even when hated and scorned. Jeremiah now asks God to avenge him again. Set these hypocritical priests aside and make them sheep for the slaughter. Again, this carries a tone of being certain God will do this.

Verse 4 *How long will the land mourn, And the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, For the wickedness of those who dwell there, Because they said, “He will not see our final end.”* How long will God allow the land to suffer for the wickedness and sin. Others ruin the land, and it impacts God’s people. Beasts, birds, even the plants are suffering. Certainly, the people are as well. We know from later chapters in Jeremiah that the land of Judah was enduring a severe drought at this time, as well as threats of war. Jeremiah draws a direct line between these sufferings and the wicked men dwelling in the land. Now, these very same men plot to kill Jeremiah, so he will not see the prophecies, which they don’t believe by the way, come to fruition.

Verses 5-6 *If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, they wearied you, Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan? 6For even your brothers, the house of your father, Even they have dealt treacherously with you; Yes, they have called a multitude after you. Do not believe them, Even though they speak smooth words to you.* Now, God speaks. If men cannot contend successfully with lesser powers, such as other men, how will they contend with the greatest power, God? Likewise, if Jeremiah is overwhelmed and wearied by the conspirators of Anathoth, how will he endure the kings and princes of Jerusalem? If Jeremiah struggles with persecution in Anathoth, which is relatively peaceful, how will he deal with Jerusalem, which is a floodplain of persecution. God is warning Jeremiah not to expect less persecution, but to prepare for more, as the time of Judah’s downfall approaches. The Chaldeans will sweep like a flood across the plains of the Jordan, bringing far greater violence and wickedness than Jeremiah is experiencing right now. God reminds Jeremiah that even his brethren, the priests of his hometown, have dealt treacherously with him. They’ve endeavored to turn the people against him. The very people that should be most supportive of Jeremiah have turned most hostile against him.

Verse 7 *“I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.* God continues saying that He has withdrawn His favor from the House that is called by His name, the Temple. God has withdrawn His Presence from among His heritage – the people called by His name. He has given His beloved into the hands of the enemy – Assyrians, Syrians, Babylonians, and Chaldeans.

Verses 8-9 *My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; It cries out against Me; Therefore I have hated it. 9My heritage is to Me like a speckled vulture; The vultures all around are against her. Come, assemble all the beasts of the field, Bring them to devour!* The nation which once called Him God and followed as His sheep have now started crying out like a roaring lion against Him, threatening and killing His prophets. This once beloved nation now blasphemes God’s name and authority. Therefore, God is now bringing judgement against the nation. My heritage is a speckled vulture – a ravenous bird, speckled with the blood of the prophets and with the blood found while doing evil. The people have turned from God and become savages, like beasts in the field consuming what is left of God’s blessings.

Verses 10-11*“Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, They have trodden My portion underfoot; They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. 11They have made it desolate; Desolate, it mourns to Me; The whole land is made desolate, Because no one takes it to heart.* The wicked have destroyed the once glorious and wealthy land that God terms a vineyard. Both Jewish and Gentile rulers have devoured. By wickedness and neglect, they have trodden down the portion God provided. It has become desolate. In that desolation, the land cries out to God. It mourns. The people have failed to see and acknowledge God as these calamities have come. They have failed to take it to heart and humble themselves in repentance.  
Verses 12-13*The plunderers have come On all the desolate heights in the wilderness, For the sword of the Lord shall devour From one end of the land to the other end of the land; No flesh shall have peace. 13They have sown wheat but reaped thorns; They have put themselves to pain but do not profit. But be ashamed of your harvest Because of the fierce anger of the Lord.”* The plunderers or the spoilers, the Chaldeans and the Babylonians, have captured all the high places and natural fortresses in the country. Once again, we find Jeremiah speaking as though this has already happened. God called these armies, and they are now His sword, executing His judgement. The land will be conquered from one end to the other. No flesh shall have peace, meaning that no man will be exempt from the coming disaster. The people have sown the seed and will reap no profit. The efforts of the Jewish people will come to nothing but expense. Though they try to save themselves, it will all come to calamity. The returns they get from all their efforts will be shamefully low, because they’re fighting against God.

Verses 14-15 *Thus says the Lord: “Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit - behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. 15Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land.* Thus says the Lord about all neighbors – Moabites, Ammonites, Idumeans, Philistines, these are the evil neighbors – that touch the inheritance, or border on the land of Israel – Behold, I will pluck them out. The Babylonians will carry them away into captivity as well. Any of the Jews that have hidden in these countries will be plucked out as well. Now, God speaks of the return of the Jews to Israel. Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return – We know this happened under King Cyrus in 539 BC, but we also know that this foreshadows the Jews and the Gentiles in the end times. Punishment and exile will end and God will have compassion. He will bring them back to the land of Israel. The Gospel will give both Jew and Gentile a Way to be grafted into the True Vine, and be called the children of God.

Verses 16-17 *And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people. 17But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation,” says the Lord.* If the people will leave their idols and wicked ways, turn back to God, and learn His Ways and His Commandments – if they will become true worshippers of God in Spirit and in Truth – If they will swear by His name, they will be saved. The priests diligently taught the people to sin and worship Baal. Now, they must be diligent to teach the truth. By pursuing God, they will be established. The Jews and Gentiles alike will have a portion in the Kingdom of God. **BUT …** if they will not obey, they will be utterly destroyed. Isaiah 60:12 says - *For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, And those nations shall be utterly ruined*. We know, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord.

And so we leave Jeremiah tonight. God has spoken. The judgement will come and the people will go into captivity, but He will be merciful and preserve a remnant to return in 70 years. Jeremiah is assured – the wicked will not prosper forever. The treacherous will not be permitted to sin forever. In the end, God will bring all things under the rule of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, it is our call to spread the Gospel and witness to all, while some might yet be saved.