

# EXCLUSIVE

## JEREMIAH 12:1-13

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

(Write "that's not fair!" on the board.)

1. What situations might a child say, "That's not fair."?

There are plenty of times when children and adults might feel like something in life is not fair.

2. Can you name a time when you or someone you know, suffered for doing the right thing?

Some Biblical examples would be Joseph in Genesis, who resisted Potiphar's wife's advances and was falsely accused for it; or Daniel, who prayed and was arrested and thrown into the lions' den.

But there are modern examples as well: For example, in 2013, Aaron Klein, co-owner of Sweet Cakes by Melissa bakery in Oregon, was fined \$135,000 for refusing to make a gay wedding cake that violated his conscience. Last year the State reduced the fine to "only" \$30,000. Klein and his wife had to shut down their business and leave the state. They did the right thing—but then suffered for doing it.

Our study today deals with God's people breaking the covenant between them and God.

3. What images come to your mind when you hear the word covenant? (The covenant God made with His people through Moses at Mount Sinai.)

4. In what ways does a marriage covenant parallel a salvation covenant with God? (We pledge to have our most intimate relationship with God and Him alone.)

In today's study, we will hear Jeremiah asking God hard questions about His justice. God's response is to point Jeremiah toward the promises found in a covenant relationship with Him. As we think about our hard circumstances, we can trust in God's promises for us as well.

### **JUST? Read Jeremiah 12:1-4**

1. What foundational point did Jeremiah make in verse 1? (The Lord is righteous, even if it seems otherwise!)

His use of the personal name of God, Yahweh, affirmed his personal relationship with God. Because Jeremiah knows God is righteous and through his personal relationship with God, he can "plead his case" with Him. If God was not a personal God, you couldn't ask Him. And if He was not a righteous God, there would be no need to ask Him why bad things happen, because we wouldn't expect Him to do good. It's only because God is good that we don't understand when those bad things happen.

2. Why do the wicked prosper? What is the assumption behind this question? (Gods isn't fair! If you think that material possessions are the secret to happiness, then you will struggle with such thoughts. If you find your contentment in God's care and provision, then you won't be concerned about the prosperity of others.)

3. Why should we learn to trust God's wisdom, justice, and timing? (We know God loves us and has a plan for our lives. And when we trust his wisdom, justice, and timing we can be at peace. See Romans 8:28.)

When we are going through the storms of life, "He already sees the rainbow when we see only clouds."

4. Why is it at times so difficult to trust God? (We see others doing so well and living like the devil and we question why?)

He saw people speak God's name as if they were devoted to Him. In their hearts, though, they do not acknowledge Him. Jeremiah was sure God knew what was going on with them, so none of this made sense to him.

5. What situations might cause a person to wonder if God is just? (Like Jeremiah, we see people living a sinful lifestyle and seemingly prospering while we are struggling.)

God is perfect and can be trusted in every aspect of life. He also understands our questions. I believe He welcomes them. He wants us to bring them to Him so He can walk with us through our difficult times.

6. Where are you feeling impatient with God now?

7. Amid your questions, how can you remind yourself that God is in control and that His timing is perfect?
  8. How can verses like these encourage our hearts when we see injustice around us? (We are not alone. If the great prophets and apostles had questions, it's okay for us to ask tough questions.)
  9. What did Jeremiah want God to do with the wicked? Do you ever feel that way?
- While evil people might seem to prosper, God is still in control. He will bring justice in His timing. Patience while we wait for His timing is key. Ask yourself "What does God want me to learn from this situation?" "How can I grow spiritually from this?"

### **CAPABLE? Read Jeremiah 12:5-6**

1. In modern day vernacular, what was God telling Jeremiah? (If you think it's bad now, you ain't seen anything yet'!)
2. How comforting do you think God's answer was to Jeremiah? (I would say, that's not very comforting! But the truth is, God does not always have an "easy, comforting" answer for us. Sometimes the answer is: you know what; things are hard, and you need to persevere through it! Sometimes the answer is like it is to Jeremiah here: things are going to get worse before they get better! Sometimes things are going to get harder before they get easier! That was the case with Jeremiah here. God says: You're running with footmen now, but soon you're going to be running with horses. If this is wearing you out, it's fixing to get worse!
3. What is the danger of basing our faithfulness to God on the response of others? (Others may not respond at all to our ministry or they may be two-faced about it and tell us what they think we want to hear.)

We are to listen to and respond to God alone and respond to His commands. If we are faithful to God what others think doesn't matter.

4. What was Jeremiah's family's response going to be toward him? (Don't believe them when they speak well of you!)
  5. Who do you trust more than anyone else in the world?
  6. What makes that person so trustworthy? (They have proved themselves to be so in the past.)
- Like Jeremiah, we need to trust in God's strength. He alone is completely righteous and completely trustworthy.

### **ABANDONED? Read Jeremiah 12:7-13**

As I read these verses, I ask myself, "How many different illustrations does God use to try to turn His people back to Him"?

So, after His personal word to Jeremiah, God answers his question in verses 7-13. And His answer is, don't worry Jeremiah, I AM going to judge them. Things are not going to go well for them in the future. He talks in vs: 7 and following, about what was going to happen to them. Now, He speaks in "past tense", the "perfect tense" in Hebrew, as if it has already happened—because in God's eyes it HAD already happened. It was GOING to happen. They were not going to "get away" with anything. They were going to be judged.

1. What does God say He is going to do to them or cause to happen to them? (V7— "abandon My house; desert My inheritance...given them into the hand of her enemies"; V9 "the beasts of the field will devour them"; V11 "it'll be made a desolation"; V12 "destroyers will come; there is no peace for anyone"; V13 "they will sow wheat but reap thorns.")

All these together show us the wicked are not "getting away" with anything. The wicked who were persecuting Jeremiah may be prospering right now, but God says don't worry; His judgment is coming on them.

2. Notice God's description of His people as "the love of my life." How does that make you feel?
3. Can you say the same about Him, that He is your first love?

Just as Jeremiah could not trust his own family, the Lord could not trust His people. He loved them, but they had rejected Him. So, He would abandon them to exile.

4. How did God describe His inheritance, the people of Judah? (A carcass in a hyena's lair. Vultures were circling and waiting for the opportunity to swoop down and devour its remains. The vultures could be literal, or they could be symbolic of the foreign armies that would attack God's people.)

God specifically talked about "shepherds," probably foreign kings who would devastate the Promised Land and its people. They would leave God's inheritance and His vineyard "desolate" and in despair.

5. How does God discipline His wayward people today? (He allows the natural consequences of our sin to be experienced. He also brings judgment on us when we continue in our sin.)

C. S. Lewis puts it this way: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God really gets our attention through our pain!

God had invited the people of Judah into a special covenant relationship with Himself. They had rejected God, so He was forced to abandon them.

6. But is that the last word? Is there no hope at all?

### **Read Jeremiah 12:14-17**

If my people will turn to me I will reestablish them in the land I gave them. There would even seem to be hope for the foreign nations if they would turn and worship Yahweh.

### **SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!**

1. What are some ways Jeremiah's description of Judah can be seen today? (Our nation is so wicked! People say they believe the Bible but live as if it doesn't even exist. Judgment is coming but people are blind to the truth.)
2. How can we encourage each other to maintain a singular and exclusive devotion to the Lord while living in a sinful world? (Pray for each other. Spend time with Christian brothers and sisters. Stay in the Word. Worship and study God's Word together.)

None of us have gone through anything like what Jeremiah went through for God: He was falsely accused, brutally beaten, repeatedly imprisoned, and fearfully threatened, coming close to losing his own life. But God was faithful to him through it all!

3. Recall a time when God was faithful to you while others failed you. Who needs to hear your story of God's faithfulness?

**When God disciplines us, as He did Judah, it is always out of love. He never stops loving us!**