

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The Barren Fig Tree

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus spoke a parable using the fig tree and common husbandry practices to teach an important lesson to His hearers (*Luke 13:6-9*). The story is straightforward. A man had in his vineyard a fig tree. After three years of seeking to find fruit, but disappointed with none yielded; he tells his vinedresser to cut the fig tree down. The vinedresser appeals to the owner to delay the cutting down of the tree for the year until he digs around the tree, and fertilizes the tree. If the tree then yields figs, well; but if it does not after these efforts, then the owner shall cut it down.

Only Luke records this parable of Jesus. Observing the context, we seek an understanding as to why Jesus spoke the parable, and its meaning.

Jesus was conversing with some who told Him of a tragic event suffered by some Galileans. Their “*blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices*” (*Luke 13:1*). Apparently, some people who lived in Galilee traveled to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the temple. In so doing, the command came from the governor to kill them, thus mingling their blood with their sacrifices. The reason as to why Pilate did this, we do not know. But Jesus’ response

implies that the reason for the report was not about Pilate’s motives, but a revelation of the character of the worshippers. Jesus asks, “*Think ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?*” (*Luke 13:2*).

Jesus was challenging popular thought among the Jews that when bad things happen to people, it is proof from God that they are not righteous before Him. It is proof in time that they, apart from others who are not suffering a calamity, are being punished. Jesus follows up His question with this affirmation: “*I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all in likewise perish*” (*Luke 13:3*).

Jesus then points to another tragic incident for consideration: “*...Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that were offenders above all that dwell in Jerusalem?*” (*Luke 13:4*). He then answers His own question, “*I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (*Luke 13:5*).

Jesus takes the experience of the Galileans and connects it with another calamity that happened in the southeast part of the wall of Jerusalem. A tower near the pool

of Siloam collapsed, killing eighteen citizens of Jerusalem. Jesus wants all to know that the murdered Galileans were not more sinners than other living Galileans; and the present citizens in Jerusalem were no less sinners than the eighteen who were crushed under the collapsing tower in Jerusalem.

It is instructive to note that Jesus takes the isolated calamity of a few and enlarges it to drive home a lesson to the rest of the group. Do you think these Galileans were sinners above “all the Galileans?” “Do you think the eighteen accidentally killed by the fallen tower were more offenders than “all the men that dwell in Jerusalem?” “

Isaiah describes Israel as “*the vineyard of Jehovah*” (*Isaiah 5:7*). He cultivated it and protected it. But as it did not produce the fruit of justice and righteousness, it was allowed to become a place for thorns and briars (*cf. Isaiah 5:1-7*).

Jesus connects Jerusalem with a vineyard of figs, like Isaiah connected Israel with a vineyard of grapes. If the work of cultivating the hearts of the people does not work, then Jerusalem will likewise perish as the eighteen.