

Unless You Repent You Will Perish

Luke 13: 1-9

DIG: What idea about this news from **Jerusalem** did Jesus reject? How does He apply the new in a new way? In verses 6-9, what does the **fig tree** represent? Who does **the owner** represent? Who does **the farmer** represent? Why the urgency? Has Isra'el been replaced by the Church? Why? Why not?

REFLECT: How would you compare your life to the **fig tree**? If you have **one more year** like the **fig tree** to turn your life around, what would you do? What **fruit** do you want to be producing by this time next year?

Now, is literally, *at that very time*. This word continued the theme of Luke 12:54-59 as Jesus challenged the crowds on the need to be reconciled to ADONAI. The Lord was confronted by **some** who denied His messiahship with a cleverly designed plot to trap Him. There were **some** present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1). Recognizing that the Nazarene came from Galilee they presumed that His sympathies would be with the Galileans, whom Pilate had put to death while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple, and Yeshua would, on the one hand, condemn the Roman procurator. This would then give them a basis for accusing Him before Pilate in hopes that he would put Christ to death as a seditionist against Rome. On the other hand, Jesus might express sympathy for the Galileans because the Jews believed that any unusual calamity was viewed as divine judgment against an individual because of some secret sin. So to express sympathy for these Galileans would be to contradict the popular belief of the Jews about suffering as a sign of God's displeasure and, in effect, blame God for the sinfulness of these men. They believed that any way Jesus answered they would have a basis for accusing Him. Check mate.

But Christ condemned neither the Galileans nor Pilate. He rejected the popular notion of any association between sin and suffering (John 9:3), declaring that they were neither less nor worse sinners than any other Israelite. Jesus answered: Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? Then Jesus made a pointed reply to His accusers, saying: I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13:2-3). This must have stung those who tried to trick Him because the Master said that they were just as guilty as those whom they judged as being guilty of God's wrath.

Yeshua then added another incident **Himself** to reinforce His exhortation to change their way of thinking. **Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4)?** There were **eighteen men** who were crushed by **the falling tower of Siloam**, probably when **Pilate** was constructing the aqueduct, which **he** paid for by stealing money from the Temple treasury (Josephus Antiquities 2:9 and 4). **The Jews felt these fellow Israelites sinned when they worked on Pilates' project because they didn't donate their wages back to the Temple treasury from which it was stolen.** The Lord denied that those men were any worse than the rest of the people **living in Jerusalem**. Again, **He** warned them in prophetic language what would happen to them if they didn't **repent**, saying: **I tell you, no! But unless you repent you too will all perish as they did (Luke 13:5).** This was literally fulfilled in the fall of **Yerushalayim** when **it** was violently destroyed by Titus the Roman general and multitudes perished beneath the falling walls of their **City** and Temple (see **Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av 70 AD**).¹⁰⁵⁰

This word **repent** (Hebrew: *mshuwabh* (feminine noun), meaning *faithless, unfaithful, apostasy*, or *shuwb* (verb), meaning *repent, turn, forsaking all sin, or confessing the sin* (for more detail see my commentary on **Jeremiah Ac - The Book of Jeremiah From a Jewish Perspective: Key Word: shuwb**) is one of His favorites. **John** used it repeatedly, as did **Yeshua** in His earlier preaching (**Luke 5:23**), and it would also be at the heart of the churches preaching in **Acts** as well. **The Lord** said it was not only **Galilean** sinners or victims of tragedy in **Jerusalem** who needed to repent; all of **Yeshua's** (and **Luke's**) audience must repent lest they come under divine judgment.

The exclusion of most Jews from **God's** Kingdom, a theme repeated continually in **Acts 13:46-47, 18:6, and 28:26-30**, would also be understood from this passage. Despite the reprieve from judgment, **Isra'el** brought forth no **fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8)**. **Jesus** foresaw that His preaching, like **Jeremiah's**, would also fall on deaf ears and cold hearts, so **He** grieved over **Isra'el (Luke 13:34-35 and 21:24)**. The axe, already at the root (**Luke 3:9**), would be swung and the fallen tree thrown into the fire. Clearly, **Luke** understood the events of 70 AD as the fulfillment of this divine judgment. Yet **Luke** also wanted his readers to understand that what happened to **Isra'el** was also a warning to them. That means us. Yikes!¹⁰⁵¹

Christ then proceeded to explain through a parable why that generation was worthy of judgment. The whole nation was guilty of fruitlessness. Then he told this parable: **A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the farmer, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. It took three years for a fig tree to**

attain maturity. For **three years** Jesus had been calling Isra'el to repentance, but **she** had not repented to bring forth **the fruit** of righteousness. **Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"** Now **the man** seeks to rid the vineyard of this worthless **tree** and plant something that will use the space more profitably. **Messiah, the farmer,** however, interceded to give **the fig tree** one last opportunity. If it does not bear **fruit** in the coming year after additional care and treatment, it will then be **cut down**. **"Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it.** The digging serves to loosen the soil in order to allow water to sink down to its roots so it has room to grow. If no **fruit** appears after that, it is clearly a bad **tree**. **If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down"** (Luke 13:6-9).

The fig tree represents Isra'el (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ba - The Song of the Vineyard**; also see **Jeremiah 8:13, 24:1-10; Hosea 9:10 and 16**), and **ADONAI** is the owner of **the vineyard**. **A fig tree** is planted for only one purpose - to provide **fruit**. **A fruitless fig tree** is not only worthless itself, but it occupies ground that could be used by a tree that could bear **fruit**. The only sensible thing to do then, is to **cut down the fruitless tree** so that the land may be used by **a tree** that will **bear fruit**. **The Son of Man** had come to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of **God**. This was **Israel's** last opportunity to repent before **she** would be subject to divine judgment. Sadly, **she** rejected her **Meshiach**. **Isra'el** was to be cut off, that is, brought under national judgment. As stated above, this judgment would come in 70 AD, when Titus would destroy the city of **Jerusalem** and the Temple. But this did not mean the termination of **God's** program for **Isra'el**, but indicated that she would be set aside for a time. Through a new program **God** would produce fruit for His glory. **Christ** revealed this new program when **He** was in Caesarea Philippi (see **Fx - On This Rock I Will Build My Church**). Later, when in **Yerushalayim** **He** spoke again of the setting aside of **Isra'el** to institute a new program through which **God** would work in the present age (see **Iy - By What Authority Are You Doing These Things**).¹⁰⁵²

In these verses **Jesus** shows how patient **ADONAI** is with the nation of **Isra'el**. The **fig tree** metaphor is frequently used in the TaNaKh, and also in **Mattityahu 21:18-22** to represent the Jewish people, who were expected to **bear fruit** by leading righteous lives and by communicating **God's** truth to the other Gentile nations of the world (**Isaiah 9:6**). So, has the **one more year** passed? Are the Jewish people **cut down** or set aside by **God** and replaced by the Church? Certainly not (**Jeremiah 31:33-36**)! **Heaven forbid (Romans 11:1-2 and 11-12)**! Some Jews, having trusted in **Yeshua Ha Mashiach**, remain united with **Him** and **bear fruit** (**Yochanan 15:1-8**, in the vine metaphor); while **Ha'Shem** patiently preserves the Jewish people as a whole until **all Isar'el** (the believing remnant at the end of the Great Tribulation, see my commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**) will be saved (**Romans 11:26**).¹⁰⁵³

In **His** unending patience, **God** gives **His** people numerous opportunities to turn to **Him** in repentance and bear the fruit of **His** life within them. **He** never tires of welcoming us back to **Him**. **He** sees our potential to bear fruit and will help us if we would only repent. But, as **Messiah's** parable illustrates, this is no excuse for delaying our response.

If we were "in charge," we would probably be much quicker than **Jesus** to condemn those committing sins, especially sins that hurt us directly. How many times have we wished that a particularly unpleasant person would receive his or her due? However, if we treat others according to the demands of retribution, we would have to submit ourselves to the same form of justice - not a pleasant prospect. Sinners ourselves, we too would stand condemned.

Thankfully, **God** doesn't work that way. While **He** knows that we deserve condemnation, **He** withholds judgment in the hope that we will accept **His** call. **God** is not the author of retribution and misfortune, and **He** does not rejoice in the destruction of the wicked. **For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares Adonai ELOHIM. Repent and live (Ezekiel 18:32). He** only offers goodness and life. The prayer of David rings true: **Bless ADONAI, my soul, and forget none of his benefits! He forgives all your offenses, He heals all your diseases, He redeems your life from the pit, He surrounds you with grace and compassion (Psalm 103:2-4 CJB).**

If **God** treats us with mercy and love, how should we treat others? Our willingness to serve others is a reliable measure of how fully we have embraced the love and mercy of our **Father**. Far from leaving us hopeless, **He** sent **His** own **Son** to preach the Good News, and if we repent from our sins and turn to **Him** as our **Lord** and **Savior**, fill us with **His Spirit**. Let us reach out to others with the same patience and love we have received from **God**. Let us also ask **the Ruach HaKodesh** to increase our ability to receive mercy from **Him**, and in return, show it to others.

Lord Jesus, we come to You with grateful hearts, for You provide the way back to our heavenly Father. Help us yield to Your Ruach as we reach out to others.¹⁰⁵⁴