

The Perils of a Barren Life

Luke 13.6-9

God doesn't change: When He pronounces judgment on evil, it applies to everyone. God's dealings with Israel reflect timeless truths, and they indirectly apply to us. This principle is critical to remember as we read the parable of the barren fig tree: Will Israel's fate be ours?

Setting: Jesus Warns of Failure to Believe in Him

- They forecast the weather, but don't discern the times! (12.54-56)
- Judgment day is coming: Are you ready? (12.57-59)
- Unless you repent, you will all perish! (13.1-5)

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

- *Fig tree planted in vineyard: God's people Israel*
- *Fig tree barren for three years; owner says 'Cut it down'*
- *Gardener asks for more time to cultivate and fertilize it*
- *If it bears fruit, it will stay; if not, it will be cut down*

A Parable for Israel, and Indirectly for Us

- *God had planted Israel; Jesus had proclaimed the kingdom*
- *Israel's failure to receive her Messiah doomed her (cf. 13.34-35)*
- *A fruitless life is a life "ripe for judgment"*

FRUITFUL...



OR FRUITLESS?

1. In Luke 12, Jesus exhorts His disciples not to focus on possessions in this life, but to trust God to provide their needs, and 'invest' for the coming kingdom by giving to others, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (vv13-34). He then told them to be 'faithful servants,' 'on the alert,' watching for the kingdom (vv35-48), and foretold coming judgment (49-53). At this point in Luke's narrative, Jesus harshly confronts his listeners for not heeding His message. How does He expose their hypocritical rejection of Him? What do they need to do before judgment comes? (See vv54-59.)
2. Luke 13.1-5 refers to two events only recorded here – Pilate killing some Galilean worshippers in the temple, and eighteen people who died when a tower in Siloam fell on them. Jesus states the reason self-righteous people gave for such awful events, that victims were worse sinners than other people (2), then says, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (3,5). Jesus warned His Jewish listeners often of coming judgment (see Mt. 3.7; 23.34-38; Lk 3.7-9; 21:20-22). To what catastrophic event in first-century Israel do you think Jesus' warning points?
3. While those who rejected Jesus were willfully blind to the truths in His parables, His message was not hidden, and it is obvious today. The parable of the barren fig tree uses images (vineyard, fig tree) which represent the nation of Israel and God's blessings on them (Isa. 5.7; Jer. 8.13; Hos. 2.12; 9.10; Joel 1.7, 12; 2.22; Zech. 3.10). What does the lack of fruit for three years represent? (Hint: In what year of Jesus' ministry did this take place?) Who is the owner of the vineyard? What does he want to do? Who is the 'keeper' of the vineyard? What does he say? What might this signify in Jesus' ministry, the Jews' response to it, and their eventual judgment?
4. This parable exhibits a truth about God we can apply today: Israel didn't produce fruits of repentance (Lk.3.7-9), and faced judgment. Christians likewise invite God's judgment if they fail to bear fruit (Jn. 15.1-7; Heb. 10.29-31; Rev. 2.5; cf. Acts 5.1-11; 1 Cor. 11.28-32). What 'fruit' are you bearing in your life for Christ?