

## Luke 13

Written by K B Napier  
Wednesday, 19 April 2017 16:55

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The main content in this chapter is that Jesus was warning those He came to call to repentance – His fellow Jews. He warned that unless they turned back to truth and worship they would be cast away into hell. He was also warned Himself, that Herod wanted to murder Him. But, Jesus is the Christ, and He refused to allow personal danger to divert Him from His goal. We are witnessing in this text a truncated version of the intensity and intrigue that surrounded the Lord in His last few days. All around Him were members of the Great Sanhedrin, who were plotting His downfall, possibly in league with the king, Herod. Yet, He carried on.

### Verses 1-5

1.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

3.

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

4.

Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5.

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, someone brought Him news that governor Pilate had just massacred Galileans as they sacrificed in the Temple at Jerusalem. Pilate had previously committed a similar act of murder on Samaritans, but this is not that story. At that time Galileans

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were well-armed men, able to look after themselves, so it seems likely that they were attacked suddenly by Pilate's soldiers, for reasons unknown to us. As the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD proved, the Romans had no qualms over committing murder and mayhem, even in God's house.

There was a belief that someone who so horribly suffers must surely have provoked God's special anger, so He sent men to kill them. Sadly, the same kind of thinking pervades many churches today! I well remember Christians saying that I must have done something really bad for others to attack me, and then bring me to financial ruin. This, of course, only added to my misery at the time, but these do-gooder brethren had no care for that, or for me. And, because they deemed me worthy only of God's wrath, they did not help me at a time of dire need; after all, it was my own fault! Obviously, Jesus saw the same kind of sinful, hurtful thinking in the people of His day. Do you really think those murdered Galileans were any worse than every other Galilean, because of their awful end, He asked the crowd?

As if in a prophetic way, He possibly hinted at Himself, of His own death by the hands of the Sanhedrin, who also invoked the help of Pilate (who, though generally vicious, did not side with the Sanhedrin\* against Jesus). As Flavius Josephus commented:

*"At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of the people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out."*

(Testimonium Flavianum, Jewish Antiquities 18.63-64)

Jesus quickly dispelled such a repugnant idea. Rather, He warned that unless the people repented, they would also end up not just dead but in hell, reaping the anger of Almighty God forever.

To reinforce His words, Jesus then mentioned another current news story, of 18 men who died when a tower fell on them in Siloam\*. Did they, too, 'deserve' to die by the hand of God for

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supposed sins? No, He said, they simply had an accident... but woe-betide them if their hearts *were* far from God. Again, Jesus repeated His warning – unless you wish to end up in hell, you must repent before it is too late. Not long before, Jesus spoke to the crowd about a man who owned large barns but was not ready for his coming death. Who amongst us IS ready? (*\*Possibly, the tower was part of the pool of Siloam/Bethsaida, which would have had a large number of infirm and lame people laying under its shade, but this is a 'good guess'*).

The Lord calls on us all to wait with anticipation for His coming, and not to be asleep. All of us must be spiritually keen and aware, so that we are not suddenly overcome by anything unexpected. The more we sleep the less we can be ready!

Ever noted that there are many scandal-mongers in our churches? They love to speak quickly about Christians who know misfortune, and are very quick to blame their sad circumstances on their supposed sins. Thus, they speak with a wicked and spiteful tongue, as they do not just try to remove planks from the eyes of those they malign, but they actually insert them into their eyes, to elaborate on their stories, and do not help them in any way! I have come under the lashings of such tongues, and I would not wish them on anyone, even if they *had* sinned.

Jesus' words are plain: beware, everyone, for God will come as a thief and take our lives, by His own decree, so we must always be ready in spirit and mind. Note, too, the hidden message – that God will cause men to perish if they do not repent; He does not forgive those who remain in their sin and do not repent. It is a popular belief today that we must forgive all men, whether or not we know them, and whether or not they repent. Such is a sorry belief, for it is wrong. (See relevant articles).

(\*Sanhedrin. Each city in Israel had a Sanhedrin, a religious council of about 23 judges, but not an even number, so as to avoid deadlock in judgments. The 'Great Sanhedrin' ruled over them all in Jerusalem, as Roman intermediaries, and took precedence. The Pharisees who dogged Jesus during His ministry were likely members of their local sanhedrins, though news of major matters travelled fast from outer sanhedrins to the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, which was ruled by a Nasi or prince/chief/leader who may, or may not, have been the serving Kohen Gadol/Chief Priest).

### Verses 6-9

1.

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He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

2.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

3.

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

4.

And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Jesus also gave the people a parable. At first sight it might appear to be disconnected from what He had previously said, but it is closely linked. After warning them that they must obey God and worship Him at all times, He then tells them what will happen if they do not. A landowner had a vineyard and on a walk one day saw that a fig tree was still not bearing fruit after three years. He ordered his vine-dresser to cut the fig tree down because it was useless. But, the dresser pleaded for the owner to let him apply fertilizer to the plant to see if it would bear fruit the next year. If it was still barren after such care and attention, then he would cut it down.

What does this tell you? It speaks of those who claim to be believers but do not produce fruit of any kind... and there are many of these in our churches today. God demands that they be driven from His sight, but Jesus Christ, His Son, pleads for the Father to let the failing claimant to faith to be 'given a chance' while He urges the claimant to follow Him in truth and love. Is this not how our Lord treats us? With compassion, even when we are spiritually barren? But, beware, for if we continue to be fruitless, our lives will be cut down. Of course, this implies that those who are cut down are actually saved, but remain in their sins. God will never tolerate this evil.

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This parable refers to the Jews and their nation. The Messiah, the promised One, had come. They either believed and followed Him, or they would perish. For now, God would let them live (*“let it alone this year”*).

But, if they did not listen and repent, He would destroy them

(*“if not, after that thou shalt be cut down*

*”). This symbolic ‘year’ lasted until 70 AD, and then Israel was removed as a nation... the judgment of God can never be erased or changed. In this text we see that God gave them a short period to change, but, if they did not, they would reap the whirlwind of His wrath. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was, then, a judgment from God – the Romans were only the means He used to bring about that judgment.*

### Verses 10-17

1.

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

2.

And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

3.

And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

4.

And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

5.

And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

6.

The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

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7.

And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

8.

And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Very shortly afterwards, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on a Saturday. A woman who had a “spirit of infirmity” for 18 years was in the female section of the synagogue, behind the dividing screen. Her condition meant she was doubled up, with her head bent towards the floor. (Today, a similar condition is caused by osteoporosis or some other calcium deficiency. It does not have any cure).

Here, as an exercise in interpretation, I should give you an idea of what is meant by a “*spirit of infirmity*”.

You are probably familiar with the Greek neuter noun, *pneuma*

. It is this word that Jesus used to describe the woman’s condition. It can refer to the Holy Spirit, or God’s personality, or His power and work. Another set of meanings refers to the ‘vital principle’ that makes a body alive; or to the way we think and act mentally, or even to the spirit that has left the body (leaving the body dead).

Another set of meanings includes both kinds of angels, holy and demonic, the latter able to inhabit human bodies, or to the nature of Christ as co-equal with God. Another set of meanings refers to the source of our mental and spiritual power, emotions, etc. A final set of meanings is of the movement of air (such as a strong breeze), or the wind, or the breath of the nose/mouth. At no time does the word *pneuma* refer to an impersonal force. Most believers think it only refers to the spirit of God/Holy Spirit, but this is just ordinary ignorance. As you can see, the meaning can be any one of the sets of meanings, dependent on context, etc.

The actual meaning to be used is the task of proper interpretation, and in this case we need to

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examine the text to see what the context is. Here, the interpretation is very simple. Firstly, we see that Jesus Himself said the woman had a “spirit” of infirmity. “Infirmity” or *astheneia* (a word that underpins modern words referring to weakness) is a lack of strength; weakness. This can be an inborn weakness or one that is pressed upon the body, as in an externally-acquired illness. The word can also mean a weakness of soul, or inability to understand, or the inability to do great things spiritually, or to stop corrupt thoughts, or to bear trials and problems.

So, what is the meaning in this text? The second clue is that the woman’s body was bent completely forwards – a physical problem. In the Greek this is *sygklyptō*, which would have caused stress when trying to breathe or eat, and a very real problem in seeing where she was going. Therefore, place “spirit” and “infirmity” together, as Jesus did, and the conclusion is that the woman’s very distressing condition

*was*

physical... but with a proviso...

Jesus just declared her to be healed as He laid His hands on her. She immediately stood up straight, to the astonishment of the congregation, who must have known her personally. It is not until verse 16 that we find the woman’s condition was put upon her by demons (*“whom Satan hath bound”*)

– hence the “spirit” of her condition. Though her condition could easily be mistaken for osteoporosis or some other bone problem, Jesus could see the root cause – Satan. This meant the woman was NOT suffering from an illness, but from the malign, forced leaning-forward by a demon. It is a fact that demons can produce conditions similar to physical ones.

Sadly, the leader of the synagogue was angry! He could only fume inwardly. His reason was that Jesus had healed on a seventh-day Sabbath, and was considered to be ‘work’! The leader pompously called to the people that man has the opportunity to work six days a week, so anyone wanting healing should use those six days and not the Sabbath.

But, he was wrong, for the woman did not come to Jesus for healing. Instead, Jesus saw her, took compassion, and called her to Himself. Then, He healed her. Secondly, He would not be there the next Sabbath. Jesus called the man an hypocrite... did he not, like everyone else, unbuckle his ox or ass from its stall-chains on the Sabbath, so that it might know a period of relative freedom as it was led to the watering trough? Is not a poor, suffering woman more precious than an ox? And is not that small act of watering just the same as ‘work’?

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Jesus spoke kindly of the woman as a *"daughter of Abraham"*. This was a commendation for being a member of God's chosen people. He openly declared her condition to be caused by Satanic enforcement, and freed her of the evil. It seems He did this without casting out a demon... and this can easily occur, as Jesus is God and can work His power whichever way He pleases. Jesus scorned the ruler of the synagogue; in an earlier incident Jesus rebuked similar sceptics when He ate corn on a Sabbath as He walked through a field. Christians are allowed to do good on a Sabbath, and was it not good to heal a poor woman held captive by an awful condition on a Sabbath?

Jesus' words had the desired effect and His critics were suddenly ashamed of their statements. Freed of the constraints put on them by their synagogue ruler, the people then rejoiced because of the miracle. Today, there are many who criticise fellow believers for doing good, but in forms they do not recognise. For them, 'doing good' must conform to their own definition of it! Anything else 'must be ungodly'!

### Verses 18-22

1.

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?

2.

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

3.

And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?

4.

It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

5.

And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.

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Jesus then spoke of the kingdom of God, possibly in answer to a question put to Him by the crowd. What is it like? What is the closest earthly thing to compare it to? Jesus said it was like a tiny mustard seed sown in a garden. There, it grew and became a large tree, its last state being greater than its seemingly insignificant seedling state. It grew so large that birds used its branches to live in. Thus, the kingdom of God might look small now – but it would soon become greater to see. In truth, of course, it has always been great... each generation's 'remnant' added to all the others, is vast!

Then, Jesus gave another illustration: when a woman added yeast to her dough the dough would grow many-fold. Jesus began to add to His flock during His three years of ministry, but the flock would continue to grow exponentially throughout the rest of human history until the numbers would be beyond calculation... even during times of persecution and apparent low growth, and until the future end of the earth.

Jesus went on preaching and healing, Sabbath day or not, teaching the people of God's demands and His kingdom. And all the while He was making His way toward Jerusalem, so that His purpose for coming could be fulfilled.

### **Verses 23-27**

1.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them,

2.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

3.

When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are:

4.

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Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.

5.

But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

At one point a man asked Jesus a very deep question, one that leads to division of theology even today. And Jesus answered succinctly; He gave an answer that still holds true, so it silences those who hold an opposite view.

**“Are there few that be saved?”** The ‘saved’ is **sōzō**, a word that speaks of spiritual salvation as well as salvation from an earthly dilemma. Jesus had been talking about the souls of men and God’s response to them, so we can take it that spiritual salvation was the subject. The man who asked the question must have had a reason (whether genuine or not) for asking the question, and we remember that Jesus had spoken of the few who would be saved in several contexts previously. This is confirmed by the rest of the text...

We must *“strive”* to enter the strait gate. But, many who tried to get in could not. To ‘strive’ in this text means to use great zeal to obtain something – the entering through the strait gate – and to fight off adversaries. The gate is called ‘strait’ because it is very narrow, requiring effort to find it. Also, it is called strait because it is not found by human means or by mere desire to do so. The word ‘seek’ can include the idea of seeking by meditation, thought, reason, etc., AFTER being born-again. Many try to approach God by their own efforts (works) but they will never find the gate (the entrance to eternal life), because the entrance is only found after the Holy Spirit shows it to us (being born again). That is why the majority do not find the gate – it is invisible to all but the elect, who are chosen to see it.

We KNOW this is the meaning, because God Himself tells us that NO MAN seeks after God of his own natural volition. Thus, he can only desire after God after God has firstly caused him to be born again! (Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22. John 6:44&65, et al). The answer to the question is, then, that few are saved, and only those who are already elect in eternity will see heaven.

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This is exemplified by verse 25, where we see the Master has shut the door/gate. This is symbolic of His closing the doors to heaven against those who are not elect. Those who remain outside the gate are not known to the Master and He sends them away. He 'does not know them' means He did not choose them to salvation, so they are not in the Book of Life.

Unsettled by this, those who persist in knocking to enter, say they have eaten with the master and he has taught in their streets, and they listened. Even so, the master – Christ – answers: *"I know you not"*

and tells them to go away:

*"depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity".*

Those who are not elect will never, by any human means, enter heaven and will never be saved. It does not matter if they were church members, went out preaching, or proclaimed their salvation! If they are not elect, all their efforts are in vain, and they will be counted amongst the other unsaved sinners.

Of course, Jesus was speaking particularly to His fellow Jews (though the principles apply to Christians also). He was warning them that though they made all the right gestures, and performed all required sacrifices and religious rites, they were, nevertheless, filled with iniquity. God did not want the sacrifices and observances of men whose hearts were far from Him! They are the fakes, those who do outward works but have unworthy hearts.

The words we have here are not the same as the sugar-coated words of modern preachers, who only preach love. They omit the serious and eternal truths, so that everyone feels comfortable without being called worthless sinners. In this way they think they are heading for the strait gate, but finally enter the broad way of destruction, rejected by God and bound for hell.

### Verses 28-30

1.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

2.

And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

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3.

And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

Because so few Jews truly believed, they would not enter heaven and would cry out in great anguish when they find themselves judged to hell. They will see their greatest earthly fathers in heaven, but would not enter themselves. Moses, Abraham, Jacob, the slain prophets – all would be in God's abode. But, not the unchosen ones.

As the non-elect make their way to a place of eternal misery, countless others would come from everywhere on earth, to sit down in the kingdom of God. The term 'sit down' interprets as a position of rest and contentment, a fixed position. Thus, it refers to the end of all true believers, whose salvation is finally rounded-off by being in God's actual presence. And when they come, it does not matter what their status was on earth, for in heaven all are equal... no-one is first and no-one is last!

### Verses 31-35

1.

The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.

2.

And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

3.

Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

4.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee;

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how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

5.

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

On the same day Jesus warned about the precarious position of the Jews, Pharisees came to Him with a warning, that Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him, so escape! This incident *might* show that not all Pharisees hated Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it might also show that the Pharisees tried to get Christ out of the country without angering the admiring crowds. In other words, they were lying and simply wanted to frighten Him into either silence or running away.

Whatever the reasons, Jesus was defiant – His tasks were not yet finished! His response would either cause the Pharisees to become even angrier, or it would force them to face Herod. He gave the Pharisees a message for Herod, calling the king a “fox”. The word was a commonly-used metaphorical term for a sly, crafty man. This certainly applied to the Herodian family, whose political machinations kept them in sub-power, murderously and corruptly.

Jesus said He would continue to cast out demons and heal the sick until the third day, an allusion to the very day He would be killed. He told them He would be “*perfected*” on that third day. The word,

*teleio*

*ō*,  
used in this context, means that His work would be finished, His tasks accomplished; the Pharisees and Herod did not realise that the harder they pushed Christ, the more exactly they followed prophecy and helped to bring about the salvation of many! So, Christ was telling Herod that His goal was almost reached.

Jesus gave them another reason why He would not just run away – a true prophet could not die outside Jerusalem. He spoke with anguish, that Jerusalem was responsible for killing the prophets by stoning. God wanted to gather the nation to Himself, like a brooding hen, but the people refused His protection and love.

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Jesus completed His message with another prophecy: Herod's and Israel's house would fall into ruin, and they would not see Christ again until He returned a second time to gather His true children. As an aside, then, those who claim to see Jesus on this earth are liars. Jesus Himself said He would not come again until His glorious return just before judgment day. This also means He will not return to head a one thousand year reign on earth... a commonly-held belief without scriptural foundation (see relevant article).

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