

The Holy Bible



Commentaries

by

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The unfruitful fig tree

Lent

The unfruitful fig tree

Luke 13:1-9 “There were present at that season some who told Him of the Galilleans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, “Suppose ye that these Galilleans were sinners above all the other Galilleans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all other men that dwelt in Jerusalem? **I tell you, nay;** but unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” He spoke also this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Behold, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?’ And he answering said unto him, ‘Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig around it and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.’””

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. Here Luke prepares the reader for the death of Jesus.

Luke 13:31-33 “The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto Him, “Get thee out and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee.” And He said unto them, ... Nevertheless I must walk today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.”

After the crucifixion, there was a concern by some believers that Jesus had died as a result of sin, for we read in Galatians (written A.D. 55)

Gal 3:13* Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is every one who hangeth on a tree”),

And Matthew 27:54 written A.D. 85

“Now when the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly, this was the Son of God!””

The centurion did not also say “a righteous man” which apparently made some believers suspicious that he died a sinner.

Luke wants to set the record straight (written A.D. 95).

In Luke’s version the centurion says “

Lu 23:47*...“Certainly this was a righteous man!”

Jesus gives examples of people who were killed in Jerusalem, none of them killed as a consequence of sin.

In the first case they were Galilean visitors who came to worship at the Temple. In the second innocent visitors to Jerusalem.

*think ye that they were sinners above all other men that dwelt in Jerusalem? **I tell you, nay;***

Then Jesus warns His Apostles/disciples, that unless they change their life and do better, they will also perish like these innocent people. Then he tells a parable:

For three years the Lord has expected fruit from his fig tree, and yet he found none. The Lord suggests the “tree” be cut down as it is taking up space uselessly. But the keeper of the vineyard pleads for another year, that he will fertilize it, and hopefully it will bear fruit, and if not the Lord can cut it down.

The fig tree is a metaphor for Israel. The Lord is Almighty God, and the keeper of the vineyard is Jesus. The **three years means sufficient time** has passed for Israel to bear fruit.

Here in these verses, the fig tree is slated to be *cut down* by God's command and this is a warning to Israel. God makes His terrifying love and judgment of Israel very clear to the Jews by putting Jesus on the cross. To the Jews and onlookers, He is demonstrating that no one can escape judgment, not even Jesus, the most righteous of all men, escapes judgment. God judges our righteousness, our goodness, our obedience, and our innocence (Job). But here also is the Son of God who loves Israel and has taken onto Himself all of its sin. So, it is Israel which is judged, but it is Jesus the perfect and righteous man who will be **sacrificed** for Israel's sin. It will be a terrifying demonstration of God's judgment at work. It is this demonstration, of the awesome judgment of God, that will be taken to all corners of the earth. It will be *The Gospel* - God is Sovereign of the world, God rules, Israel has been judged, God loves you and He has come for you - repent!

But Christ had asked God the Father for another "year". He will try to bring Israel to life by digging around it (taking the gospel to the surrounding Nations) and by fertilizing Israel (with the Holy Spirit which will bring *repentance* to the Apostles and disciples, and then to all Israel). But, though God is merciful, and will delay his actual punishment of Israel, the demonstration of His judgment of Israel must still be made public, through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

*1Jo 2:2** And He is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only, but also **for the sins of the whole world**. (see P.7 following)

but nowhere in scripture does it state "that Christ **died** for the sins of the whole world" (p231 Intro to Dogmatic Theology - 39

The world is to know that the Jews do not have an exclusive right to God. That they cannot count on God's judgment to be in their favor just because they are Jews. That other Nations are also to benefit from God's righteous judgment, and to be offered salvation.

Though Israel's sins were forgiven, most knew nothing of it. Most were blinded to the truth. Few repented - a remnant saw the truth, as God had foretold.

Israel continued much as before. God demonstrated to the world that there was to be no favoritism towards Israel.

In A.D. 66 Israel was at war with Rome and hundreds of thousands were killed, men women and children. At Massada and the other desert strongholds, all the Jews died from starvation, from suicide, or were put to death.

Then, after 4 years of siege, Jerusalem was starved to death, and those still alive in A.D. 70 when the Romans stormed the city were slaughtered or taken into slavery. The Temple was razed to the ground, only a retaining wall is left. The cherished Menorah was carried as a trophy to Rome, the Torah was removed by Titus's representative (possibly Josephus). There was a remnant that God saved. Some Pharisees were allowed to go and set up a spiritual center in another town, outside the Roman Empire. Jews who had been warned by God and escaped before the siege, settled in far away Lands, in Persia, Asia, Asia Minor, and Egypt, where they would join Christian-Jewish communities, such as those at Corinth, Ephesus, Antioch.

Another war in A.D. 135 between the Romans and the Jewish rebels, resulted in the denial of access to Judea (now Roman) of any Jew. The land was taken from them, as God had promised, and it was in foreign hands for 1813 years (until 1948).

Such was God's terrible punishment for the sin of Israel. The fig tree was cut down.

But God's righteous judgment demonstrated on the cross, will eventually save the Jews, for while Israel is blind, the truth was taken to the other Nations, yet God's promise "*when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, all Israel will be saved*", will be fulfilled.

Within 300 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the entire Roman Empire from Alexandria to Britain had become Monotheistic. The Christian Bible brought the Gospel of the crucifixion and resurrection to every corner of the World.

Today, for Christians who have received the grace of God the Holy Spirit, and have repented by it, God has declared (judged) them righteous, and through His mercy, they are granted the opportunity to be saved, and through a demonstration of their love for God and for nothing created, and through charity to the brethren of Christ, and by persevering in that love and charity to the end, God will judge them - at the final judgment - and confirm their salvation.

God's grace makes us slaves of righteousness (Ro 6:18)

For want of a better description of the meaning of propitiation, here is one thought.

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he is the propitiation

This does not mean that they are put away. He is a propitiation, as is said in Romans, "through faith, by His blood." It is for believers, therefore, that all this becomes effectual, and only for these. Yet so thoroughly sufficient is the perfect Sacrifice that has been offered, and so plainly is it available for every soul that honestly desires it that we can say: "For the sins of the whole world," without the least trouble or question. Beautiful it is to realize that it is just in John's Gospel, where the deepest things of divine grace are told out, that there is the fullest going out in heart to all. The end and the provision are for all. The sin of rejection is upon him who rejects, and he shall never be able to say that there was not a remedy, or that he was not able to avail himself of the remedy.

This idea that the visible manifestation of God's presence in the world is through Israel's history is well described by J.A. Sanders in his work "The Old Testament in the Cross" Harper 1961.