

Learning More with  
**Stories of the Master**

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~ **Slashing Swords, Crashing Buildings** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 13:1-9.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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<b>Luke 13:1-9 NASB</b>	<b>Luke 13:1-9 NLT</b>
<p>Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were <i>greater</i> sinners than all <i>other</i> Galileans because they suffered this <i>fate</i>? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were <i>worse</i> culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”</p> <p><sup>6</sup> And He <i>began</i> telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ <sup>8</sup> And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; <sup>9</sup> and if it bears fruit next year, <i>fine</i>; but if not, cut it down.’”</p>	<p>About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. <sup>2</sup> “Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?” Jesus asked. “Is that why they suffered? <sup>3</sup> Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. <sup>4</sup> And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too.”</p> <p><sup>6</sup> Then Jesus told this story: “A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. <sup>7</sup> Finally, he said to his gardener, ‘I’ve waited three years, and there hasn’t been a single fig! Cut it down. It’s just taking up space in the garden.’</p> <p><sup>8</sup> “The gardener answered, ‘Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I’ll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. <sup>9</sup> If we get figs next year, <i>fine</i>. If not, then you can cut it down.’</p>

**2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.**

The following insights are from Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*.

- Josephus records many massacres by Pilate in Antiquities 7:45-62; 18:60-62; 20:113-117.
- When someone arrives with a story of such an event, he is wanting a response of sympathy and a call to action to retaliate, especially in this part of the world, where blood revenge was so important.
- Edersheim notes (from Bailey) that the falling tower occurred when men were working on Pilate’s aqueduct. Pilate took money from the Temple treasury for this project which

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horrified the people who would have viewed the falling stonework as the justice of God. In that world, no other viewpoint would have been considered. It was an act of God's justice. But Jesus doesn't focus on that – "they got what they deserved" – just as he doesn't focus on Pilate in the first example.

- Those who are in political or war efforts always assume that they are on the right side. Their suffering is the only kind that matters.
- Fig trees in vineyards were common occurrences together. See Joel 1:7, 12.
- In Palestine, fig trees bear fruit ten months out of the year so the owner should find fruit at just about any time.
- The fig tree with the vine are a symbol of peace – See Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10
- In Hosea 9:10 it represented Israel in its first state of purity, innocence, and responsiveness to God. In Hosea 9:16 it symbolizes its fruitlessness.
- The owner had the fig tree planted. This fits with Middle Eastern culture where an owner would not do this but have a servant or hired worker do it.
- The tree would have three years in which to grow, then three years when the fruit was forbidden. The master would not seek the fruit during years 4-6 based on Leviticus 19:23. Then he came seeking for fruit in the 7<sup>th</sup> year, and the 8<sup>th</sup>, and the 9<sup>th</sup> but still no fruit.
- Dig it out – fsuqih; Forgive it – shbuqih. This was a play on words in Aramaic.

The following insights are from the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible.

- Not only was Pilate ruthless with the people, but Jerusalem was crowded during festivals and they could sometimes get out of control. This was a volatile mixture.
- Fig trees were not normally fertilized. This detail shows that the owner is doing everything possible to ensure that the fig tree will bear fruit.

### **3. Answer these reflective questions.**

**Why do you think the men in the story were telling Jesus about what happened in the Temple in Jerusalem? Do you think they were looking for sympathy or revenge?**

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**In a blood revenge culture, it took great courage for Jesus to tell the men who reported about Pilate’s atrocities that the real problem was their sin, and not Pilate. What does this tell you about how committed Jesus is to the truth? What does this teach us about the most important need for humanity?**

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**In the culture of that day, the people believed that the falling tower was an act of God’s judgment. But how did Jesus use this incident with the people? What did he want them to understand?**

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**In the story Jesus told, who is the owner? Who is the vineyard keeper? Who does the fig tree represent?**

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**What lesson did Jesus want to teach his listeners? What lesson does he want to teach us?**

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