

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 30, Pilate, the Tower and the Fig Tree. Part I, Luke 13:1-9

1. In these verses we are dealing with two units of tradition, verses 1-5, and 6-9. Each one discusses politics and repentance, and so we examine them together. The second is called a p. In the first, Jesus makes his point with the use of two concrete comparisons and thus the material falls under the category of p. speech. We do not have intellectualizing abstractions, but rather the theology is tied to 2 specific illustrations of people who were suddenly killed, one by Pilate & the other by a falling tower. Thus each unit can be seen as a type of p.
2. Elsewhere this section is called “The call of the Kingdom to Israel.” (Bailey) This can be part of the Lucan travel narrative that can likewise be called “the Call of the Kingdom to Israel and to the Outcasts. Of the two units in this text the first is more general and addresses itself to the people. The second is directed to the nation. In each unity the literary structure is examined and then the text studied in detail.
3. **PILATE AND THE TOWER: (Luke 13:1-5).**

The passage opens with the following statement: “*And some came at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*” The West has traditionally translated the opening phrase of this verse as “*There were some present at that very time who....*” But Eastern fathers in the Syriac and Arabic tradition almost w/o exception read the verb ‘pareimi’ as “come rather than present. Thus they translate, “*and some came at that time who...*” This understanding of the text indicates a break between passages and does not tie this unit of tradition to what precedes it. Plummer prefers this latter reading.
4. So atrocity storytellers suddenly appear and report to Jesus the incident of “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” We are not told the intention of the story tellers. However, this intent is relative clear to anyone who lives or has lived in the world of violent political conflicts. C. H. Dodd speaks of 1st century Judaism’s concern to maintain its identity; “This aim is being pursued in a situation of resentment where pagan domination and national sensitiveness were mounting toward a final climax

of A.D. 66. We have to allow something like a war mentality among large sections of the Jewish people and we know how it can affect their judgment. I was not clear to those who kept watch upon him that Jesus really cared for the 'National cause.' When Jesus heard about the Roman slaughter of Israelites, he did not respond with indignant denunciation to the Romans, but rather a call to his own people to 'repent.'

5. Josephus records a number of massacres during this period, but never mentioned this one, Plummer tries to find historical records for this one. Marshall says this is a historical event not recorded in secular sources. We don't need either Marshall or Plummer, Civil and national violence spawn lots of incredible rumors. One record is enough for ten others. The author spent 18 months agonizing with Lebanese people in regards to their "Civil War" of 1975-1976. That war was sparked by the massacre of 28 on a bus outside of Beirut. From that time all types of stories, true and untrue were rampant across the land. Such stories serve a function in a community at war. The teller and listener can become emotionally stirred to a point of rage than can then motivate them to heroism in retaliation, but "WOE" to the person who says 'have you checked your sources?' Or who says, do not forget that your hands aren't clean either. All such talk is considered un loyal and the one who dares express such sentiments can expect a verbal, if not physical attack.
6. Pilate's soldiers could have been so insensitive to a Jewish religious practices as to attack worshipers during the very act of giving an offering. Such an act would hardly have escaped Josephus who was not slow to criticize Pilate. Some minor attack on zealots in Jerusalem could have been easily blown up into the report we have in this text. The response is "How long, O Lord!" "Destroy the house of evil Romans. Hear the cries of the people!" This same thing could be shared in the mountains in a Christian village in Lebanon and be announced, "They came into the church with machine guns and mowed down people in the very act of taking the Lord's Supper. The blood of the worshipers was mingled with the communion wine on the Altar! What do you think of that? The listener must answer with sympathy and denunciation. For Jesus, if his nationalistic goals is suspect as Dodd suggests, then the report may well be intended to measure Jesus' loyalty to the national cause. If he doesn't want to voice and 'indigent denunciation of Roman brutality. (Dodd, More). Then it is the safest for them to walk away with Amos' admonition to silence as an operating principal, see Amos 5:13.

7. Ibn al-Salibi thinks that the reporters are trying to spring a trap; *“This even gave some of them an opportunity to tempt our Lord. They sent (the report) to him to see what he would answer. For if he said, “this killing is a clear case of injustice and oppression,’ they would then defame him before the Roman governor, claiming that he was overstepping the law and that his teachings violated the same Roman Law. Yet the Glorified One responded to their promptings with a call to repentance and compared this fearful event with the fall of a tower in Siloam.”* Ibn Al Salibi’s thoughtful suggestion is quite likely a part of the motivation of the questioners. They have made a political statement. If Jesus responds with a supportive reply, that answer could be used against him. But Jesus’ answer demonstrates the same quality of courage seen in Jeremiah’s announcement in a world of political uncertainty. (Jer. 26). Jesus’ response is neither denunciation in Rome, nor silence. To the form and the content of that response we now turn the literary form is as follows.

“And he answered them,

1 “Do you think that those Galileans worse sinners they were than all the other Galileans because they suffered thus?

2 I tell you, No! But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

3 Or those eighteen upon whom the tower fell (in Siloam and killed them). Do you think worse debtors they were than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?

3 I tell you, No! But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

8. There are two verses with a common refrain that together comprise four stanzas. Each verse is an illustration of violent death. The first is by the hated imperial ruler. The second is assumed by the text to be an act of God. The theme of “all” closes each stanza and ties the four together. The first line of the third stanza may have been an editorial note with some extra information. The fall of the tower may have been a popular event that caught the mind of the masses, (which seems to be the case because Jesus assumes that the audience knows about the incident), then the extra information about the place and the result would not be necessary for the original audience. As the sayings of Jesus are collected, recorded and circulated, some extra details need to be added. The author has identified footnotes with extra information given in earlier copies. (Bailey). In this case the information is insignificant theologically. The author does not believe this writing is in any way poetry, but does have typical p. style. If the lines are closer together, than there is the

same four stanza structure in the p. of the "Unjust Judge." In regard to the content these points need to be made;

9. Jesus assumes that the informers are trying to initiate a discussion on the relationship between suffering and sinning. Yet the intent of the informers is not stated. If we would read the account backward and supply the missing motive from the answer, then we would read the account forward from the original political stance and understand it as a complete surprise. An atrocity story is told, Jesus is expected to denounce the Roman Overlords. He does not, he opens the question of sin and suffering and the call for them to repent! Political enthusiasts struggling for this concept of justice do not ordinarily take kindly to such a call. The brief reference to the question of the relationship between sin and suffering is a bridge to the conclusion that focuses on repentance.
10. On the topic of sin and suffering, the text gives a double renunciation of a one to one relationship between them similar to the account of the man born blind in John 9:1-3, The popular opinion is there that the man is born blind due to the sin of either himself or his parents. Jesus denies both. In Luke 5:19, Jesus addressed the paralyzed man on the bed and announces the forgiveness of sins. Jesus seems there also to be speaking to the same mentality. We assume that the paralyzed man has been told of his condition because he is a sinner. Thus healing cannot be accomplished until he is assured of forgiveness of his sins. In reference to this text, the scholar Edersheim makes the intriguing suggestion that the 18 killed by the tower were working on Pilates aqueduct, much to the horror of the local population. Thus if some masonry had fallen on such workmen, the entire countryside would assume that this is God's judgment for their collaboration with the project. This suggestion is intriguing because it relates to the two illustrations of Pilate. Some such background may well have been the context of the falling stonework. Yet speculation is pointless. The text clearly affirms that in both cases (in the opinion of Jesus) the suffering of those involved cannot be traced to their sins.