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## IS CORONAVIRUS PUNISHMENT FOR SIN?

The story Jesus tells of a man who came looking for fruit on a barren fig tree he planted and his decision to finally cut it down came in response to the news of a barbaric act of sacrilegious cruelty at the hands of Pilate. *"Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices," (Lk. 13:1).* The followers of Judas of Galilee (*Acts 5:37*) may very well be who is referenced in this report. He began drawing away Jewish followers from the Roman government, declaring it was not lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. The Galileans were known for being exceptionally wicked from the writings of Josephus, and had a tendency to be involved with sedition. It

It was not uncommon for uprisings to occur and would often be met with swift, harsh retribution at the hands of Pilate. As they were offering their sacrifices in the temple they were all killed, hence, Pilate mingled their blood with their sacrifices. The Jews had a tendency of linking extraordinary catastrophe with a sense of God's judgment upon great abominable wickedness. As sacrifices were intended to cleanse the sinner of their guilt, it certainly seemed the wretchedness and hopelessness of these Galileans was exceptionally great since not even an act of sacrificial worship could save them from their punishment. Jesus challenged them to reject this very common misconception that only the worst offenders would suffer

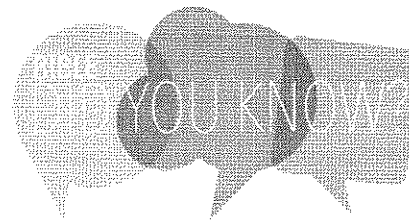
the worst fate, prompting Him to ask, *“Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,”* (Lk. 13:2-5). To drive this point home, Jesus then tells the parable of a man who waited three years for a fig tree he planted to bear fruit, only to find it serving no other purpose than taking up space and ordered it to be cut down. The vineyard keeper protested, asking one more year be given while the utmost care would be taken to provide everything the tree needed in order to be of use to the owner. *“And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down,’”* (Lk. 13:8-9). Here, Jesus illustrates that while God is exceptionally patient with us, eventually the time for waiting on us to change will expire and the fruits of

repentance will be expected to be seen. Just like the owner of the fig tree, God expects results. And just like the vineyard keeper who protested the initial cutting down of the tree before one more year of excessive help was provided the tree, God provides all of the necessary tools and sufficient support and opportunity to grow and produce the fruit He is expecting in us. Jesus needed to warn those bringing the news of the tragic events involving these Galileans that it would not simply be those who lived in excessive sinful immoral behavior who would suffer the worst punishment at the hands of God, but all those who refused to accept Christ as King and willfully followed Him in faithful obedience. The ultimate horrific fate of Jerusalem when Rome besieged and destroyed it was a catastrophic level of human suffering and agonizing terror. Before the initial invasion, Rome would completely surround the city, cutting off it's food supply, resulting in savage cannibalism from the tortures of starvation. Was this fate brought from excessive levels of immoral behavior? No. From Israel's overall unwillingness to accept

the message of John the Baptist and Jesus, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Just like the patience and special prodding of both the owner and the vineyard keeper, God had given them sufficient time and help to bring the results he expected. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"* (Mt. 23:37-38). In much the same way, there is often a misconception that the horrific eternal punishment of hell is only for the most vile of offenders. Let the words of Jesus be a reminder, no, but unless we repent, we will all likewise perish. God has given you everything you need to grow and produce the fruit in your life He is expecting. Obey and follow Christ in faith before the time comes when His patience is expired. *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away...If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they*

*are burned,"* (Jn. 15:2, 6).

This current situation with the Coronavirus is no different. Rather than pondering whether or not this is the result of God's wrath upon nations for disobedience, we would be much better focusing our attention on our own sins. The time now is for self-examination. Our we ready to meet the Lord if we were to die today? Where is our zeal for Him, our zeal for reaching the lost, our zeal for lifting up our brethren? Rather than looking at various ones around us and speculating their condition before God, we would be much better prepared focusing on our own selves and seeking Him more diligently. — Daniel Ruegg



***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."***

***2 Cor. 1:3-4***

# People, Places, and Things of the **BIBLE**



## *Proof of Babylon Conquest of Jerusalem*

Archaeologists excavating on Mount Zion in Jerusalem have uncovered evidence of the Babylonian conquest of the city, appearing to confirm a Biblical account of its destruction. Academics from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte made significant finds, including ash deposits, arrowheads and broken pieces of pots and lamps. The most surprising discovery, however, was an item of jewelry, which appears to be a tassel or earring with a bell-shaped upper portion, the researchers said. Shimon Gibson, co-director of the university's Mount Zion archaeological project, told CNN that the recovery of the rare piece of jewelry is the first time that archaeologists have uncovered signs of the "elites," appearing to confirm Biblical descriptions of Jerusalem's wealth prior to the conquest in 587-586 BC. Gibson said jewelry is a rare find at conflict sites as warriors would normally loot it and melt it down. It is a "clear indication of the wealth of the inhabitants of the city at the time of the siege," he said. An earring or tassel ornament made from silver and gold, discovered at Mount Zion. The historian said that while the items in isolation do not provide conclusive evidence of the Babylonian attack, the unique mix of artifacts leads researchers to believe they have uncovered direct evidence of the conquest. "For archaeologists, an ashen layer can mean a number of different things," Gibson said in a statement. "It could be ashy deposits removed from ovens; or it could be localized burning of garbage. "However, in this case, the combination of an ashy layer full of artifacts, mixed with arrowheads, and a very special ornament indicates some kind of devastation and destruction. Nobody abandons golden jewelry and nobody has arrowheads in their domestic refuse." The location of the artifacts meant researchers were able to rule out other explanations for the findings. "We know where the ancient fortification line ran, so we know we are within the city," Gibson said. The team noted that the recovered arrowheads, known as Scythian arrowhead, are "Fairly commonplace" in battle sites from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, and were known to be used by Babylonian warriors. "This evidence points to the historical conquest of the city by Babylon because the only major destruction we have in Jerusalem for this period is the conquest of 587/586 BCE."

