

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## LUKE 12:49-14:11

Once, Jesus and His disciples stopped at a village in the hills of Samaria. The Samaritans were prejudiced toward Jews, so when they realized Jesus' destination was Jerusalem, they refused to greet His entourage.

*And His disciples, James and John, got mad...*

So much so, they asked Jesus if they could call fire from heaven and singe the bigoted Samaritans. Talk about “cancel culture.” They were its chief proponents.

And though Jesus rebuked His fiery disciples that day, Jesus too had His moments. He grieved over the sin He saw and got angry over the people's rebellion.

There were Jews so opposed to Jesus, *though they couldn't deny His miracles* they ascribed them to the power of Satan. I'm sure Jesus thought ***how dare you!***

Do you ever witness the evil and audacity of men and ask *how dare them?* People who abuse children, or exploit women, or stir up strife. Folks who reinterpret gender, and redefine marriage, and reimagine sex as if they know more than their Creator... ***How dare them?***

Numerous times Jesus could've justified calling fire down from heaven. In fact, one day that's exactly what He'll do. Read Revelation 8 and just before He returns, fire falls from heaven. Fireballs are thrown at the earth, and into the sea, and onto the rivers and streams.

And here in Luke 12:49, Jesus speaks of that time still future. He says, "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" There were moments when Jesus swelled with a righteous rage.

He knew God's judgment is just, and He was more than ready to bring it to pass, *but the time was not yet.*

He says again, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!"

The baptism that had put God's judgment on hold was Jesus' coming baptism of suffering and death.

Before Jesus judges *the world for its sin*, God first will judge *the sin of the world* in His body on the cross.

Judgment is in Jesus' hands, but first, those hands are nailed to a wooden cross as judgment for **our** sins. That was the immediate mission Jesus faced. He was headed to the cross - and each day - each step He took - our Lord understood He was inching closer.

In verse 51, Jesus asks, "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on, five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Isaiah 9 refers to Jesus as "Prince of Peace" - and that's true!

But before we're *united in Christ* - we're *divided by Christ*.  
Jesus is the line in the sand for all of mankind!

Today the lines of demarcation in our culture are drawn around race, age, gender, and political persuasion - but in the end, there'll be only two groups in the world - those *in Christ* and *outside Christ*.

This means families will be *drawn together in Christ*, but also *torn apart by Christ*. It's ironic *the greatest unifier of men* is also *the greatest source of division*.

High in the Canadian Rockies, there's a stream called "*Divide Creek*." A boulder cuts the creek into two forks.

The water that flows left rushes into the Kicking Horse River which leads to the Pacific Ocean. Whereas, the waters that flow right of the rock become the Bow River that eventually feeds the Atlantic Ocean.

The rock in the middle of Divide Creek determines the destiny of each droplet. Water molecules that start out side-by-side are separated, sent in opposite directions, and end up thousands of miles apart.

And likewise, folks who grow up side-by-side, in the same house, come to the rock called Christ and get divided. At first, the separation seems minimal. They still hang out, but the flow of their lives gradually heads in diverse directions. The current ends up taking them an eternity apart - *one to heaven and the other to hell*.

Jesus, the rock, is the fork in the stream of humanity.

Verse 54, "Then (Jesus) also said to the multitudes, "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. And

when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is." Clouds over the ocean indicate rain. Winds from the south bring a heatwave. *Jesus sounds like the Israelis weatherman.*

But here's His point, "Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?" They could read weather indicators but were oblivious to the biblical signs that pointed to the Messiah. Jesus' fulfillment of Scripture and His miracles were sure signs He was the Messiah.

Jesus says, the Jews could predict the weather, but couldn't recognize the signs of the time. "Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?"

Verse 58, "When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite." Every defense attorney knows sometimes it's best to settle out of court. Once your case reaches the judge, it's out of your control.

And this is what God offers each of us. He'll settle our case. You don't have to stand trial for your sin.

A deal is on the table. God offers us a plea. He's purchased our pardon. If we trust Him, He'll set us free.

As Jesus pointed out, one day this earth's sin and sinners will be judged. Jesus will call fire from heaven. Yet in the

meantime, God has stayed His hand. And where judgment is delayed, life can get confusing.

*Why do sinners prosper while saints go belly up?*

Right now, life is like the back of a cross stitch. All we see is the knotted, tangled underside. Life seems to be just a twisted maze of circumstances. From our limited, earthbound perspective life doesn't always make sense.

But one day, from heaven, we'll see the beautiful upper side of God's cross stitch called "life" and realize all the lines really did make sense. There was a good purpose behind everything God did. In the meantime, God is expecting us to trust Him, even in the mess.

Which sets up Luke 13 and a group of people who were perplexed by life's underside. They come to Jesus hoping He'll make sense of a current tragedy.

Verse 1, "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." We know nothing of these Galileans and the circumstances referenced. It seems they were worshippers on pilgrimage in Jerusalem. When they entered the Temple to offer their sacrifice, they were murdered in the act of worship.

*Were they guilty of an uprising the Roman guard was forced to put down? Were they just in the wrong place at the wrong time? We're not sure. We're not told.*

All we know is that Pontus Pilate despised the Jews and had no sensitivity or respect for the local customs and religion. It's likely that this was another travesty of justice inflicted by a callous Pilate on innocent Jews.

There's no doubt though this incident was front-page news. Everyone was discussing it; thus Jesus is asked to comment. "And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?" Of course, the obvious answer was "no."

These men may not have been thought of as sinners at all. They were in the Temple sacrificing to God.

But Jesus says, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Here's Jesus' point... They didn't die because they *were worse sinners*. They died because they *were sinners*. In a fallen world, all men have sinned and deserve to die. When it comes to heaven and hell, grades don't matter. So what if you make a 34 or 45 on your test? Both are failing grades. And any sinful stain will flunk you out of eternal life.

*Discreet sinners* deserve hell as much as *despicable sinners*. *Crude sinners* and *cultured sinners* go to the same place. We all need to repent. Without Jesus, nobody passes! If we don't repent, we too will perish.

Then Jesus pulls another story from the news of His day... "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?"

Here's the thought behind the question... Did God orchestrate the toppling of this tower to punish the 18 victims? Or did the tower's engineer miscalculate... or did the footings erode... or did the tour guide not read the sign that the



*tower's capacity was only rated for 15 occupants at a time... or was this just bad timing?*

The popular Jewish explanation was that when anything bad happened it was a judgment of God. All physical events could be traced to a spiritual cause.

Every sickness or calamity was tracked back to a specific sin. Jews just assumed: *bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people.*

Yet Jesus says, *"Wait! It's not that simple."* Did the victims die because they were the *"worse sinners... in Jerusalem?"* Jesus answers His own question, *"I tell you, no..."* There was nothing the victims did or didn't do to warrant them being in that tower when it fell.

The tragedy was **NOT** the result of some specific sin!

*But was it the result of sin in general?* And the answer is apparently **"Yes!"** For in the next sentence Jesus tells His listeners, *"But unless you repent you will all likewise perish."* Ultimately, all tragedy, sickness, poverty, natural disasters - are the result of sin. We live in a fallen world! Sin has thrown a wrench in the gears.

Our world is no longer the utopia God created. The sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, subjected the planet to disorder, chaos, randomness. Nature went haywire. It now acts in erratic, unpredictable ways.

The eighteen tower victims didn't die because of a specific sin, *but sin did kill them.* You can trace all death back to its original source - the sin of Adam.

When a tower falls, or when cancer strikes, or when a tornado hits - **it's no one's fault and it's everyone's fault.** It's wrong to conclude the victim deserved his plight due to some specific sin, but it's also wrong to assume we're all innocent and somehow God is at fault because He allows the conditions our sin creates.

Several years ago a church on Hwy 29 was struck by lightning. The *church* was *charred*. And I caught myself self-righteously thinking, *"I wonder what was going on in that church that God had to hit it with lightning?"*

That's the kind of conclusion Jesus tells us we should never draw. *What if our church was struck by lightning?* Would it mean something nefarious was happening? Of course not! All we could say for sure is we live in a fallen world, and often we have no clue why God allows certain events. It's wrong to force a deliberate cause onto everything that happens in life.

It reminds me of a quote by actor, John Travolta, **"The richer I get and the more famous I become, the more ordinary I realize I am, and that my only real talent is 'luck'."** This is tough for Christians to swallow.

*I don't believe in luck.* The Bible teaches that behind all my circumstances is God's providential hand, and ultimately it is. But that's not how life can seem...

Solomon actually makes a statement similar to John Travolta's in Ecclesiastes 9:11. **"The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all."** We don't like that



explanation. It doesn't satisfy our sense of fairness. *Yet when God doesn't give us any other explanation, that's the only conclusion we can draw.*

The men in the tower were just in *the wrong place at the wrong time*. It goes back to the cross-stitch. From the underside, life doesn't always make sense. Some questions won't get answered until we get to heaven!

Verse 6 “(Jesus) also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

In the OT, the fig tree was a symbol for Israel.

For the previous three years, Jesus had ministered to the Jews, yet they bore no fruit. There was no evidence they had paid attention. Now Jesus is on His final march to Jerusalem. This is His fourth year, *a year of decision for the Jews*. Israel is being given one more year to reject or accept Jesus and decide its fate.

Verse 10, “Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.”

Jesus has just taught us that we can't assume a particular illness is linked to a specific spiritual cause, but neither can

we assume it's not. Sickness can be the result of a random bacteria or an agent of Satan.

And Satan specializes in twisting people's *backs* and *beliefs* - until they can no longer raise themselves up.

Here, "*a spirit of infirmity*" tortures this woman for 18 years. She lives hunched over for nearly two decades.

Verse 12 "But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."

Many a crooked person, *literally and figuratively*, has been "*made straight*" by the touch of our Lord Jesus...

"But the ruler of the synagogue answered (He was never asked. *Jesus didn't need his permission, why is he now answering?* And) with indignation (he's mad), because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." Here, this ruler of the synagogue represents the kind of religion that tries to tell God what He can and can't do. In religion, *man's rules* matter more than *God's power* or *people's needs*.

This kind of religion creates tunnel vision where *the Law* becomes more important than *the Law Giver!*

Yes, God told *Israel* not to work on the Sabbath, but God does whatever He pleases! Nobody tells Him what to do. Religion tries to put God in a box. He doesn't fit.

“The Lord then answered him and said, “Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?”

So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound - think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” The Jewish Law allowed for exceptions.

If you can loose an animal and lead it to water, *why not free a daughter of Abraham?* Legalism is the art of stripping rules of their original intent. *It's Law without love.* God gave Israel the Law to teach them how to love. A *loveless Law* becomes cruel and oppressive.

Verse 17, “And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by (Jesus).” It was embarrassing that *a supposed man of God* was opposing *the Son of God in the name of God.*

Legalism had blinded the Jewish leaders to the truth.

“Then (Jesus) said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” The mustard seed was the smallest seed known to Jewish farmers. It became a proverbial way of referring to something imperceptible.

And Jesus is saying His Kingdom has a small and insignificant beginning. It stays under the world's radar.

Think of the growth of Christianity. Jesus' ministry was limited to a few years and a few square miles. He left no army and launched no earthly government. His church constituted a minor movement in a secluded corner. Yet over the centuries, Christianity has grown exponentially. It's swept the world and back again.

And this is always how God's kingdom spreads. God begins with little - just a man, a vision, some faith - little backing, or numbers, or publicity - and His work grows inconspicuously - as a seed in the soil. **The kingdom of God will always be an underground movement.**

It's only at the end of the age - *that what began as a bush grows into a tree* - and the birds of the air nest in its branches. The parable predicts that one day the nations will gather to God and be part of His kingdom.

But until then the Kingdom of God continues as something small and insignificant, like a mustard seed.

Verse 20 adds, **"And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."** This reiterates the previous parable.

**Like leaven or yeast, God's Kingdom influences from the inside out. It's spiritual, mysterious, and works under the surface. His love, joy, peace, and power rise up within us by His Spirit. Jesus is the king of hearts.[VIDEO CLIP - NO AUDIO]**

“And (Jesus) went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?”

And He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” The word “*narrow*” is a translation of the Greek term, “*stenos*” which means, “compress or constrict.” *Stenography* or *Shorthand* is a compressed form of writing. And apparently, the gate to heaven is going to be a constricted entryway, like a turnstile.

People will have to enter one at a time. No one gets caught up in the crowd and swept away to heaven. Each person individually decides to follow Jesus.

Thus, Jesus tells us, “*Strive to enter... the narrow gate.*” Entrance takes commitment and determination. Nobody floats in on someone else’s coattails. You don’t become a Christian by osmosis. *You yearn to enter!*

And to say “*Yes*” to Jesus is to say “*No*” to every other so-called Savior. In John 14:6, Jesus told Thomas and His disciples, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*”

That narrows the options considerably. If you’re going to follow Jesus, you can’t be afraid to take sides.

It reminds me of the judge with the deliberating jury. He instructed the court clerk to take their lunch order. When she returned, he asked if she had any idea how long the deliberations might take. The clerk replied, “*A long time.*” The judge asked, “*How can you be sure?*”

The clerk said, “Listen to their order. Eleven burgers and one hot dog... eleven coffees and one hot chocolate... eleven fruit pies and one prune danish...” Obviously, there was a nonconformist on the jury.

And if you want to get to heaven, you’ve also got to be somewhat of a nonconformist. You can’t be afraid to stick out. The path to heaven is a swim upstream.

As Jesus put it, “*Strive to enter... the narrow gate.*”

Then verse 25 “When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’” Jesus taught in their streets, ate in their homes, but they never opened their hearts to Him.

There’s a difference between *knowing Jesus and knowing about Him*. Be sure you know Him or when you arrive at eternity, you’ll be on the outside looking in.

You don’t want to hear, “*Depart from Me...*” You can cry, “*Lord, Lord,*” never having made Jesus your Lord!

For “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.” From the brink of eternity, you’ll see two landscapes. In one direction, there’s



*forever fire, and unquenchable thirst, and utter darkness* - but those are **not** the severest tortures in the place we call hell.

What causes the “**weeping and gnashing of teeth**” is when you see your friends and family enjoying heaven - *blessings you’ll never experience*. It’s the permanence of what you’ve lost that drives people nuts in hell.

I believe a one-way glass separates heaven and hell. Hell can and will see into heaven, but heaven will only see its reflection. It can’t see the miseries of hell.

Verse 29 “**They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.**” Eternity in God’s Kingdom is full of surprises! Folks in the back of the line on earth go to the head of the class in heaven.

Here’s a poem, “**I dreamed death came the other night and heaven’s gates swung open wide. An angel with halo bright ushered me inside. And there to my astonishment stood folks I’d known on earth, some I’d judged and labeled, unfit, of little worth. Angry words rose to my lips, but never were set free. For every face showed stunned surprise, no one expected me!**”

In heaven, you may have to go to the nosebleed seats to find the famous preachers and celebrity saints.

Court-side is occupied by the prayer warriors you never knew existed - folks who served backstage...

**“On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, “Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You.”**

And this was no idle threat... This was the same Herod who had just beheaded John the Baptist.

“And (Jesus) said to them, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.’”

Jesus had power over a roaring lion named “Satan,” He wasn’t afraid of a little fox called Herod. In fact, Jesus’ greatest demonstration of power was still ahead. He’ll rise the third day and ascend to heaven.

“Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.” Jesus wasn’t worried about Herod. He was destined for Jerusalem and a Roman cross... And the thought of His visit to the holy city filled His heart with passion. In verses 34-35, Jesus releases a 1000 years of pent-up grief and emotion.

He cries out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” The Jewish Talmud read, “Of the ten measures of beauty that came down to the world, Jerusalem took nine.” Even the Muslims say, “One prayer in Jerusalem is worth 40,000 elsewhere.”

Jerusalem is a majestic city. Psalm 48:2 speaks of her, “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” Jerusalem is always boiling over with life.

It’s where east meets west, ancient meets modern, history meets future. All the world’s major religions collide in

Jerusalem. It's the home of universal hopes and dreams. There's no other city like it in the world.

Jerusalem is where Abraham offered Isaac. It's the city God gave to David to be his capital. It's the site where Solomon was instructed to build the Temple.

And as Jesus now looks out over the cityscape from the top of the Mount of Olives He recalls not just His former earthly visits to Jerusalem, but the thousands of times when He leaned over the rail in heaven and longed to gather up the Jews to God... just as a mother hen gathers her chicks. But it never happened!

And why? The ominous answer was, *“you were not willing!”* It wasn't God's fault. Israel had a hard heart.

And hard hearts have consequences. *“See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'”* In a few days, Jesus will make His triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem, and the crowds will line the streets, singing the Messianic song, Psalm 118:26, *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!”*

Yet here Jesus isn't rejoicing, but mourning. Jerusalem was a privileged city, yet she never lived up to her responsibilities. Thus, the city will be destroyed and left desolate. The crowd that hailed Jesus their Messiah, will soon scream *“Crucify Him, crucify Him.”*

Chapter 14 begins, *“Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on*

the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy.” This is not the same disease the Falcons’ wide receivers contracted this past season.

In the modern world, “*dropsy*” is called “*edema*.”

It’s usually the result of a kidney shutdown. Tissues fill with fluids and the body becomes bloated. Arms and legs swell. The skin becomes mushy. Dropsy is a painful illness, and in ancient times it was often fatal.

Jesus was invited to a Pharisee’s house on the Sabbath, and a man with dropsy happened to be there.

*Was his presence deliberate? Was he a plant?*

*Could be.* The Jews often tried to trap Jesus. And particularly annoying to them was his habit of healing on the Sabbath Day. Seven times in the Gospels Jesus performed such healings and thus violated their rules.

God had prohibited work on the Sabbath, but the Jews were the ones who interpreted healing as work.

Prior to Jesus, this was academic. Few people were healed anyway. But when the Great Physician started His practice, the office was open seven days a week. This blessed the sick but vexed the proud and narrow-minded. They resented Jesus violating their rules.

“**And** (here Jesus initiates the subject. He attacks it head on.) **Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"**

**“But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you,**

having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" And they could not answer Him regarding these things." The Law made exceptions for livestock. You've heard the adage, "My ox is in a ditch."

The Law let you save your ox on the Sabbath Day, why not a human? Isn't a man or woman made in God's image more valuable than a beast of burden?

"So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.'

Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you." And verse 11 gives the moral of the story, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

When Japan finally surrendered in WW2, Bing Crosby announced on the radio, "What can you say at a time like this? I guess all anybody can do is thank God it's over." Decades later NPR's David Brooks, recounted Crosby's humble words and said how impressed he was that America won a world war and didn't boast.

He mentioned Crosby's quote in light of something he saw at a recent football game. A running back took a swing pass and was tackled by a defensive end two yards downfield. The tackler came up flexing, and gyrating, and celebrating as football players do today.

David Brooks wrote, "It occurred to me I had just watched more self-celebration after a two-yard gain than I had heard after the United States won WW2." He concluded, "It's sad how proud we've become."

The world we live in encourages **pride** - *thinking of yourself before others*. Yet the Bible says in James 4:6, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

We desperately need the wisdom of Jesus.

Exalt yourself and God will humble you. But humble yourself and God will see to it that you get exalted.