

**12:49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!**

**12:50 "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!"**

To "cast fire upon the earth" is a Semitic way of saying, "to kindle fire" (Marshall, 546). Fire is often associated with judgment and the mention of fire signals the continuation of the eschatological motif begun in 12:35. However, here it is a reference to the persecution and division that occurs as the kingdom of God advances. Luke 12:51–53 makes this clear. As Marshall states, "The process of judgment works by way of the separation of good from evil, and hence leads to the persecution of the righteous and division among men; fire, therefore, is taken to be a symbol of strife and division" (Marshall, 547).

Jesus wished that the fire was already kindled for it was a sign that God's kingdom was advancing, but it would not take place until after the cross.

"Baptism" is really a transliteration of the Greek word "baptisma" (βάπτισμα). In Greek, the word had a much broader meaning than the Christian ceremony of being immersed in water – as we normally think of it today. In the most fundamental sense it simply meant "to immerse" or "to dip in or under" (Ware, *Baptism: Three Views*, 21). For example, in normal daily Greek usage it might be used of *soaking* cloth in dye (TDNT I, 529) or in reference to the *sinking* of a ship (TDNT I, 530); it could also mean to *bathe* or *wash*. In John 13:26, the verb *bapto* (βάπτω), which is related to the noun "baptism," is used of Jesus dipping a morsel of food and giving it to Judas. The word "baptize" in this context is metaphorical meaning "immersed in suffering," or as Marshall says, "being overwhelmed by catastrophe" (Marshall 547) and is thus a reference to the cross where Jesus was inundated by a flood of suffering and God's judgment.

The same idea appears in Mark 10:38 where Jesus uses the "cup" and "baptism" as parallel images of submitting to divine judgment. The "cup" characteristically referred to judgment or retribution in the OT (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17-18; Jer. 25:15-28). When the sons of Zebedee wanted prominent spots in the kingdom, Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" He meant, "Can you drink the suffering I must drink? Can you bear the flood of misery I must bear?" Just as "drinking Jesus' cup" has nothing to do with literally drinking at all, neither does His baptism in Luke 12:50 have anything to do with water.

Therefore, in verse 49, Jesus is anticipating the circumstances that would exist after the resurrection. It was after the resurrection that Jesus was declared both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), was exalted to the right hand of God, and displayed His authority by sending the Holy Spirit. It was also when great numbers of Jews and Gentiles believed, resulting in intense animosity, persecution, and division between Christians and the world.

**12:51 "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division;  
12:52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.**

**12:53 "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."**

The enigmatic statement in 12:49 is now explained. The judgment that Jesus kindles is division that will take place because of Him, even among those of the most intimate relationships. He did not come to bring peace, but fire.

When Jesus asked, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth?" most would answer, "Yes." Isaiah 9:6 calls the Messiah "the Prince of peace." In Luke 2:14, when the angels announced Jesus' birth they said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men." So there is a sense in which Jesus does bring peace – both peace with God and peace with men. However, in another sense, His message is divisive; it challenges people to make Jesus the supreme object of their loyalty. Jesus is in effect telling the disciples to expect persecution and rejection – even among family members.

The reconciliation to God through Jesus' death also means separation of people from people. This stands in contrast to the hope of reconciliation found in many Old Testament passages (Malachi 4:5–6). There it says, "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." However, in Luke 14:26 Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." Jesus' call to discipleship takes precedence over marriage, family, and any other human relationship. This is why there is division.

The Kingdom of God is not an extension of the world but a judgment of the world (Edwards, 385). The inauguration of the kingdom at Pentecost "awakens the world to its alienated existence from its Creator" (Edwards, 385) and the effect of the kingdom coming is division.

***12:54 And He was also saying to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out.***

***12:55 "And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way.***

***12:56 "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?"***

In 12:49-53 Jesus was speaking to the disciples; in verse 54 and following He speaks to the crowds expressing His astonishment over their lack of perception. His tone is harsh. He calls His hearers hypocrites and accuses them of failing to see their opportunity (12:56). Only repentance can save them from sudden destruction (12:57-59). They had one last chance to bear fruit (13:6–9) (Tannehill, 151).

The word "time" (12:56 - *καιρός*, *kairos*) is used of a "season" or "opportunity," such as a *time* to plant, a *time* to rejoice, or *time* to raise the sails, etc. (Edwards, 387). Thus, "the present time" is not referring to the present age, but to the immediate opportunity.

In the land of Israel a cloud in the west meant that moisture was rising from the Mediterranean Sea (1 Ki. 18:44). Everyone recognized this as a sign of rain. Likewise, a wind blowing from the desert let everyone know it was going to be a hot day. Though they understood the signs of nature in the moving of the wind and rain, they could not understand the moving of God in the ministry of Christ. They were oblivious to the obvious.

**12:57 "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?"**

The crowd needed to simply consider what they saw. They needed sound judgment to determine what was right and what the right course of action might be. And they needed to decide sooner, rather than later, for their opportunity would not last forever. This is illustrated in verses 58 and 59:

**12:58 "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.**

**12:59 "I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."**

Verses 58 and 59 emphasize the exercise of wisdom and the urgency of acting. The illustration is drawn from a legal situation where someone is being dragged to court for failure to pay what is owed.

In those days, people who were jailed for owing money were beaten as an incentive for family and friends to come up with the money owed (Bock, 1200). It was, therefore, much better to do whatever was necessary to get things settled before appearing before the judge for if a guilty verdict was rendered, the prisoner would not be released until every cent was paid.

The spiritual parallel is that of the sinner who will someday appear before God. Unless he can settle his case before the judgment, he will have to face the Judge and will be punished until "every cent is paid."

Jesus is warning people to get things right before that day comes. In the context, He is telling those who saw and heard Him to use wisdom and make a decision about Him quickly.

**13:1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.**

**13:2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?"**

**13:3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**

**13:4 "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?"**

**13:5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."**

Evidently, some Galileans went to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and were killed by Pilate. In Jewish culture of the day, it was generally thought that when bad things happened to people it was God's judgment due to sin. This was the assumption that Job's counselors had in relation to the calamities that Job experienced (e.g. Job 4:7-9), even though Job 1 makes it absolutely clear that God was not judging Job for unrighteous behavior. In John 9:1-2, when Jesus and His disciples saw a man blind from birth, the first comment out of their mouths was, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Likewise, in Matthew 19:24 when Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," the disciples were astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" In both John 9 and Matthew 19 the disciples' responses came from the assumption that if something bad happens it was due to personal sin and if something good happens it

was due to personal righteousness. They assumed that blindness was God's judgment, and they could not fathom who could be saved if it was hard for a rich man, a person blessed by God, to enter the kingdom of God.

Those in the crowd thought, since Jesus was speaking in the category of judgment, they would ask about the "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Luke doesn't explain why they asked this at this time, but judging from Jesus' response, it sounds like those in the crowd were distancing themselves from Jesus' illustration in 12:58-59, and applying it to people like the Galileans whom Pilate had killed. In other words, they saw the Galileans as an example of sinners who should have repented before it was too late when they stood before the Judge.

Jesus immediately cut to the heart of what they were thinking by means of a question: "Do you suppose (are you imagining, are you assuming) that the Galileans were greater sinners than you are because they suffered such a horrible fate?" That is, were they using the Galileans as examples of people who needed to repent because they thought that the Galileans were worse sinners than they were?

The answer is that they were not worse sinners! Everyone deserves the same fate. Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul who sins will die." The threat of judgment is awaiting all. Death will come eventually and Jesus makes it absolutely clear that unless they repent they will perish as well.

The fate of the Galileans reminded Jesus of a similar situation. Outside the wall of Jerusalem was a vigorously flowing spring called Gihon. King Hezekiah built a tunnel that directed the spring's water into the city where it filled up a reservoir called the Pool of Siloam. The pool was near the intersection of the south and east walls of the city, and provided a constant supply of fresh water for Jerusalem even if the city was under attack (Bock, 1207). Evidently, tragedy struck when the tower of Siloam collapsed and eighteen people were killed. Jesus asked, "Were those people killed because they were worse sinners than others?" His answer is the same as before: Of course not! It was not because they were worse sinners that such a fate befell them. The only reason those in the crowd had not suffered a similar fate was because God had extended mercy to them.

Both the Galileans and those crushed by the tower had met death at a time they were not expecting. Thus, there is an urgency to be prepared whenever death may come. As Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near," and as 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation."

The parable that follows builds off of these examples and makes three points: (1) there is a need to repent and bear fruit; (2) God is patient, but (3) opportunity does not last forever.

**13:6 And He began 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.**

**13:7 "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?'**

**13:8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;**

***13:9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down."***

The story of the fruitless fig tree is straightforward. An owner of a vineyard went to a fig tree on his land in order to gather some figs; however, the tree was barren. Thus he spoke to the gardener and said, "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?"

"Behold" is a word that indicates surprise. What the owner found was not expected. The fig tree that had been established had no fruit for three years. Land was precious and a tree that does not bear fruit is useless; it is easier to just cut it down and make room for something that will produce. So he told the gardener to cut it down and plant something productive. The gardener, however, urged the owner to spare the tree for a little longer and allow him to dig down to fertilize the roots. If the tree produces fruit it will be spared; if it remains unfruitful it can be cut down.

Both the owner of the land and the gardener represent characteristics of God. God will judge the fruitless, but He is patient, giving people ample opportunity to repent. The parable prepares the listeners for the fate of Israel, but has an individual application to anyone who hears it as well.

Earlier, in Luke 12:53, Jesus had alluded to Micah 7:6, so Micah 7:1-2 may have also come to Jesus' mind as He gave the parable; it says, "Woe is me! For I am like the fruit pickers, like the grape gatherers. There is not a cluster of grapes to eat, or a first-ripe fig which I crave. The godly person has perished from the land, and there is no upright person among men." Just as John the Baptist had said to the Jews, ". . . bear fruits in keeping with repentance. . . Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lk. 3:8-9), so Jesus made a similar threat. In Matthew 7:19 He had also said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Like the man who had a window of opportunity to settle accounts with his adversary before appearing before the judge (Lk. 12:58-59), the fig tree is given time to bear fruit. The owner is patient, and does all He can to insure that the tree bears fruit.

This pattern of man's fruitlessness and rebellion standing by God's impending judgment and patience is seen throughout history.

- In Genesis 2, God said to man in the garden, "In the day that you eat of the fruit, you will surely die." When Adam and Eve ate it they instantly died spiritually and were separated from God, but the patience of God allowed Adam to live physically another 930 years.
- The flood of Genesis 6 and 7 was a catastrophic event. Yet according to Genesis 6:3, God gave that generation 120 years to repent. In the end, millions of people died and only eight people were saved. Peter attributes the delay of judgment as the patience of God. He says, "The patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah during the construction of the ark" (1 Peter 3:20).
- Isaiah 48:9 says, "For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off."

- Jeremiah 44:22 states that God would not punish Israel until He could bear it no longer. He delayed as long as possible.
- In Nehemiah 9:17 there is a prayer by Nehemiah that reviews the days of the exodus. He prayed, "They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that You performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them."
- Psalm 78:38 says that God "being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them."
- Psalm 136 says, "His mercy endures forever," twenty-one times.

Although judgment will come, God is patient, giving men every opportunity to repent (Lk. 12:56).

God's patience has a purpose:

Romans 2:4 says, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Some assume that since God does not instantly punish their sinful behavior, their behavior must be acceptable. They fail to realize that the lack of judgment was not indicative of approval, but is evidence of God's goodness and patience in allowing time for men to repent. Patience is not a passive action, but an active self-restraint that does not retaliate when wronged.

2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

And lastly, 2 Peter 3:15 says, "count the patience of our Lord as salvation."

The landowner's patience is unambiguous, but the tree's future fruitfulness is left open. The first sentence in verse 9 is called a third class condition in Greek. It expresses something that could possibly happen, but there is no guarantee that it will; the outcome is unknown. Thus, the sentence reads like this: "*If it bears fruit* (and we don't know if it will), then fine." The second conditional sentence ("*if not, cut it down*") is a first class condition; the "if" clause is assumed to be true; it is likely to happen. No one knows if the tree will bear fruit, but it was likely that it would be "cut down." The two sentences together imply that the tree is living on borrowed time, and there is only a dim hope that it would ever bear fruit. This makes God's patience even more glorious; He is by nature compassionate, gracious, kind, merciful, even when the hope for fruit is dim.

The parable underscores the danger that Israel and the people in the crowd were in. Israel had not borne fruit for some time, and the people Jesus was talking to were not responding. Borrowed time is not permanent. God's patience is not permanent. The time left is short; the need to respond is immediate.