

• *Jesus speaks of recent events*

We have seen that Jesus made use of an interruption in His preaching^{☞1}; now He makes use of something that had recently happened among the events taking place in Judea. Jesus speaks about things that are of interest to people.

☞1 see 12:13

• *Pilate – killings at the temple*

The Roman governor, Pilate, had killed some men while they were sacrificing at the temple. This was typical of Pilate. We know of various times when Pilate killed opponents or trouble-makers. On one occasion he killed three thousand! I suppose there was some kind of rioting in the temple; Pilate sent in his soldiers and a number of people were killed.

• *Siloam – building collapse*

Then there was another tragedy. A building in Siloam had collapsed, killing eighteen people. Everyone was talking about these events and Jesus referred to them in His teaching.

1. Suffering is not a sign of special wickedness

1. Suffering is not a sign of special wickedness. When tragedies of this kind happen, people tend to think that the suffering person was a great sinner and had deserved special punishment. This was the view of Job's friends^{☞1} (compare John 9:1–2). But suffering is not a sign of special wickedness! There are plenty of suffering people who have not specially sinned. And there are plenty of wicked people who are not specially suffering!

☞1 see Job 4:7, 8:20, 22:4-5

2. People like to interpret what is happening in the lives of others, but not in their own lives

2. People like to interpret what is happening in the lives of others, but not in their own lives. It is obvious that these events were much discussed in Judea. Everyone was debating the details of how these people in Jerusalem and at Siloam were killed. Why did it happen? Was it because they had specially sinned? Hundreds of people were interested in knowing what had happened and why it had happened. Yet the very people who like to interpret what is happening in other people's tragedies do not do much thinking about what is likely to happen to them! What might God do to them? What sudden calamity could fall upon them? Are they living in such a way that they have an unblemished record and can feel confident that no disaster will fall upon them? People like to think that others are being punished for their sins, but they also like to think that their own sins will somehow go unpunished!

• *Don't be a 'Job's comforter'*

Don't make the suffering of the other person even worse by your 'interpreting' his tragedy in this way. Don't say to him or to his family, 'If you were more righteous you would not be suffering...'. Don't be a 'Job's comforter'. When you think a person is suffering because of his sins, you are adding to his sufferings – or to the sufferings of those who are bereaved.

3. God is totally free in the way in which He brings life to an end

3. God is totally free in the way in which He brings life to an end. These people in Jerusalem and at Siloam were suddenly removed from this life. Others were allowed to live much longer. Sudden disaster is not punishment of those who have died; it is a warning to those who are alive. Unless you repent, you will perish. The word 'perish' here means 'die suddenly while unreconciled to God'. One day we will die – maybe suddenly, maybe not so suddenly. But unless we have repented of our sins, our death will be 'perishing'. It will be dying without being reconciled to God – and therefore facing God's anger against sin.

• *'Perish' means to die whilst unreconciled to God*

4. Every sudden event is a call to repentance – and especially repentance for our unfruitfulness

• God is looking for fruitfulness

• In less than 40 years after Jesus' ministry – Jerusalem was destroyed

• Ready at all times to give an account of our lives to God

• God is merciful in allowing us to live so that we will be fruitful

4. Every sudden event is a call to repentance – and especially repentance for our unfruitfulness. The people gossiping about the recent events need themselves to repent – to entirely change their attitude and outlook towards God and towards the godly life. God especially wants fruitfulness. Jesus tells a parable¹ which is connected to the previous story. A vineyard owner looks for fruitfulness from his vineyard. If it is not fruitful he will re-use the ground for something else. But the vineyard-keeper pleads that the fig-tree be left one more year before it is cut down.

¹ 13:6-9

This is a parable about what God is looking for. Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem. What will He find when He gets there? God wants fruitfulness. The people of Jerusalem have been allowed longer to live! Most of them have not been killed by Pilate. No tower of Siloam has fallen on them. God has given them more time to repent.



We remember that less than forty years after Jesus' ministry, the Roman armies would march upon Jerusalem, besiege it and then destroy it. Jerusalem was given time to repent, but then sudden calamity would come upon the entire city and nation.

The greater the privileges, the greater the response God wants. We are very happy to discuss the tragedies of others' lives and wonder why events have overtaken them. But we too will sooner or later find that events will overtake us. We are always taken by surprise at the big events that happen in our lives.

Has someone you know suddenly been called away from this life? He or she has had to give an account to God of how he or she has lived. It is appointed for people once to die – and afterwards comes the judgement¹. What happened to them is a call to you to be ready at all times to give an account of your life to God.

¹ Hebrews 9:27

Are you suffering? It does not mean that God is specially punishing you. He is not taking His revenge against you. God punished sin upon the cross! Jesus has already been punished for your sins! What God wants from you more than anything is fruitfulness. He wants some kind of reward for the time and trouble He has invested in you. He is still allowing you to live; He hopes you will become fruitful. Meanwhile God is being greatly merciful to you; He is allowing you longer to live.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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