

THE FIG TREE

Jesus made this dire prediction concerning the nation of Israel:

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

Beginning in 70 AD this prediction came true, and for nearly two millennia the Jews were dispersed to the world, while Jerusalem fell under the control of the Romans, the Muslims, the European crusaders, the Ottomans, the British, and the Jordanians. But Jesus also made another prophecy that signaled an end to Gentile dominion. In Matt. 24:32-34 He said this:

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

It is incumbent upon us to prove from Scripture that the nation of Israel is the budding fig tree in Jesus’ parable, and that is not difficult to do. Amos likened the nation to a basket of summer fruit:

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. And He said, “Amos, what do you see?” So I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the LORD said to me: “The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. (Amos 8:1-2).

Joel said this:

“For a nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion. He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree; He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white.” (1:6-7).

Hosea wrote:

“I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season.” (9:10).

When Jesus was on His way into Jerusalem, He was hungry and saw a fig tree that should have been bearing fruit, but He found only leaves. This represented the nation that He had come to minister to. He found a people who cared more for appearances than for reality, who generally rejected him, especially the leadership. The tree of Israel had no fruit, as that tree along the road symbolized. He cursed it, and though that tree would never again bear fruit, it represented the nation that would go into a long season of barrenness because of their rejection of the Messiah. So it is not hard to see that Jesus is speaking of Israel when He deals with or talks about the fig tree. This is especially true in Luke 13:5-9.

“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” He 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.’”

Jesus is the farmer seeking fruit on the fig tree (Israel), He had been seeking fruit for the three years of His ministry. Finally, He asked His Father to cut the fruitless tree down and to remove it from the ground. But the Father gave Israel another opportunity to repent and bear the fruit of faith in His Son. They squandered the chance, persecuted the Christians, even killing Stephen, and were cut off from the ground in 70 AD. They were forced to leave the land, just as the parable suggested, and the nation dispersed into a condition of dormancy.

Nevertheless, Jesus said there would come a time when the fig tree would put forth leaves and return to life. In the late 1800s and into the early twentieth century, Israeli nationalists (Zionists) began stirring as if from sleep. After 1900 years of wandering among the nations of the world, never at home and always yearning for Jerusalem, Zionists began buying up land and moving back to their former homeland. When Germany nearly exterminated European Jewry, the world, through the United Nations, exercised a very brief season of mercy, and voted to give the Jews their nation in 1948.

So the same fig tree that failed to bear fruit at His first advent would come alive again at the time of the end before His second advent. Jesus affirms this definitively in Luke 21:29-31.

Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

The summer is the time of heat, and heat answers to the Tribulation. Israel has budded and leafed out (1948 and 1967), and will, with the summer heat of the Tribulation, bear fruit. The generation born around the time of this budding that witnesses these things will not pass away until all is fulfilled, and the only way all can be fulfilled is for Israel to pass through her final seven years and bear the fruit of faith. Truly we are in the last days of the age of Grace that precede the Tribulation. As Christians, may the Lord stir in us to prepare for His upward call. May He also move in the remnant of Israel to look for their Messiah.