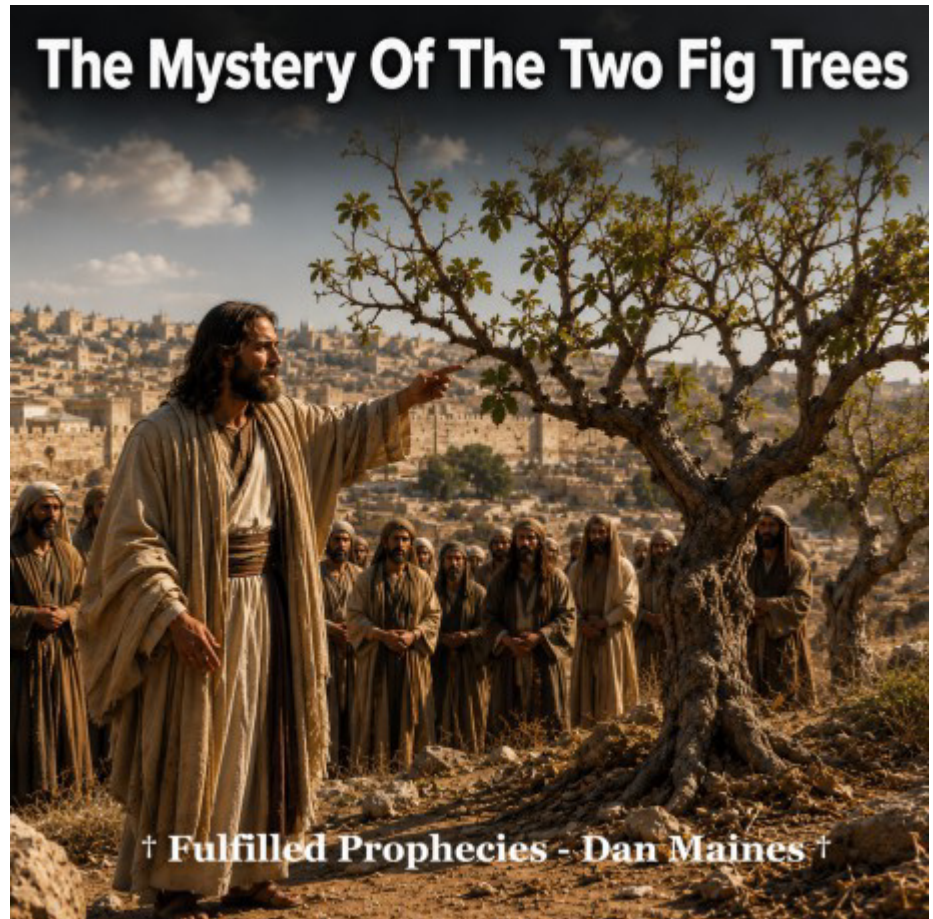


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The Mystery Of The Two Fig Trees



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Throughout the Bible, the fig tree was never just a tree. God repeatedly used it as a covenant symbol of Israel. Long before Jesus walked the roads of Judea, the prophets spoke of Israel as God's fig tree, expected to bear fruit for His glory. When Jesus later approached a barren fig tree, He wasn't reacting to a lack of breakfast. He was revealing the final chapter of Israel's covenant history. By following the Scriptures from the prophets

to Christ, the mystery of the two fig trees becomes one remarkable story of God's patience, Israel's unfruitfulness, and the fulfillment of covenant judgment.

Jeremiah 24:1-10

After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and metalworkers from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me: behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, and the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten due to rottenness. Then the LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" And I said, "Figs: the good figs are very good, and the bad ones, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness."

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans. For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not uproot them. I will also give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me wholeheartedly.

'But like the bad figs which cannot be eaten due to rottenness,' indeed, this is what the LORD says, 'so will I give up Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and the ones who live in the land of Egypt. I will make them an object of terror and an evil for all the kingdoms of the earth, as a disgrace and a proverb, a taunt and a curse in all the places where I will scatter them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the plague upon them until they are eliminated from the land which I gave to them and their

forefathers."

† Jeremiah establishes the biblical meaning of the fig tree. It represented God's covenant people, not a nation in the distant future.

† The good figs pictured those who humbled themselves before God, while the bad figs represented those who rejected Him and remained under judgment.

† From this point forward, the prophets repeatedly used the fig tree to describe Israel's spiritual condition. (Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1)

Hosea 9:10

I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;

I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season.

But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame,
And they became as detestable as that which they loved.

† God compared Israel to the first-ripe figs that brought delight to the owner.

† Instead of remaining faithful, Israel turned to idolatry and became corrupt.

† The fig tree continued to represent Israel's covenant relationship with God, showing both His love for His people and their repeated unfaithfulness. (Jeremiah 2:21)

Jeremiah 8:13

"I will certainly snatch them away," declares the LORD.
"There will be no grapes on the vine
And no figs on the fig tree,
And the leaf will wither;
And what I have given them will pass away.""

† God warned Israel centuries before Christ that the fig tree would become barren because of covenant unfaithfulness. (Jeremiah 8:5-13)

† The missing figs and fading leaves match the condition Jesus later found when He approached the fig tree outside Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 8:13; Matthew 21:18-19)

† The prophets had already declared the judgment, and Jesus brought that prophetic picture to its fulfillment. (Jeremiah 8:13; Luke 21:20-22)

Micah 7:1-2

Woe to me! For I am
Like harvests of summer fruit, like gleanings of grapes.
There is not a cluster of grapes left to eat,
Nor an early fig, which I crave.
The godly person has perished from the land,
And there is no upright person among mankind.
All of them lie in wait for bloodshed;
Each of them hunts the other with a net.

† Micah searched for good fruit but found none.

† The missing fruit represented the absence of righteousness among God's covenant people.

† This prepares us for Jesus' ministry centuries later when He also came seeking fruit from Israel. (Matthew 21:43)

† Isaiah shows that God expected covenant fruit but found rebellion.

† Jesus later applies this same vineyard imagery to Israel in His own parables.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing now for my beloved
A song of my beloved about His vineyard.
My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
He dug it all around, cleared it of stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it,
And also carved out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.

"And now, you inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.
What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done
in it?

Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce
worthless ones?

So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:
I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;
I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.

I will lay it waste;

It will not be pruned nor hoed,

But briars and thorns will come up.

I will also command the clouds not to rain on it."

For the vineyard of the LORD of armies is the house of Israel,
And the people of Judah are His delightful plant.
So He waited for justice, but behold, there was bloodshed;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

† Isaiah clearly identifies the vineyard as the house of Israel
and the men of Judah. (Isaiah 5:7)

† God expected covenant fruit, but Israel produced corruption
and injustice instead. (Isaiah 5:2, 7)

† Jesus later used the same vineyard imagery to announce
judgment upon the leaders who rejected God's Son. (Matthew
21:33-46)

Matthew 3:10

And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore,
every tree that does not bear good fruit is being cut down and
thrown into the fire.

† John the Baptist announced that covenant judgment was
already near before Jesus began His public ministry. (Matthew
3:7-10)

† The axe was already at the root because Israel's final
opportunity to bear fruit had arrived. (Luke 3:7-9; Luke 13:6-9)

† John, Jesus, and the prophets all used fruitless trees to
describe the same approaching judgment upon unbelieving
Israel. (Jeremiah 8:13; Matthew 3:10; Matthew 21:18-19)

Luke 13:6-9

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. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Look! 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?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, leave it alone 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.'"

† Jesus wasn't introducing a new symbol. He was continuing the language of the prophets.

† The fig tree represented Israel during Christ's earthly ministry.

† God had patiently sought covenant fruit from His people, but the nation continued rejecting His prophets and ultimately His Son.

† The additional year of mercy demonstrates God's patience before judgment finally came upon Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41-44)

Matthew 21:18-19

Now in the early morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves alone; and He *said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.

† Jesus didn't curse the fig tree because He was disappointed it had no breakfast for Him.

† He performed a living prophecy that every Jew familiar with the prophets should have recognized.

† The leaves gave the appearance of life, but there was no fruit. Israel maintained an outward display of religion while rejecting the very Messiah whom the Scriptures promised. (Matthew 23:27-28)

† The withered fig tree symbolized the coming end of the Old Covenant system that would reach its fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. (Hebrews 8:13; Luke 21:20-22)

Mark 11:20-21

As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. And being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree that You cursed has withered."

† The tree had withered from the roots, showing that the judgment represented by it was complete and irreversible. (Mark 11:20-21)

† The sign pointed beyond one tree to the approaching removal of the fruitless Old Covenant system. (Matthew 21:19; Hebrews 8:13)

† The disciples witnessed a visible prophecy of the judgment Jesus had already announced against Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:18-19; Matthew 23:37-38)

Matthew 21:33-46

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A FENCE AROUND IT, AND DUG A

WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and he leased it to vine-growers and went on a journey. And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his fruit. And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they did the same things to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let's kill him and take possession of his inheritance!' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the fruit in the proper seasons."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures,

'A STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE;
THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD,
AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and on whomever it falls, it will crush him."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. And although they sought to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, since they considered Him to be a prophet.

† Jesus didn't leave the meaning of the fruitless fig tree open to speculation. (Matthew 21:18-19, 33-46)

† He declared that the Kingdom would be taken from the unbelieving leaders of Israel and given to a people producing its fruit. (Matthew 21:43)

† The chief priests and Pharisees understood that Jesus was speaking directly against them. (Matthew 21:45)

Matthew 24:32-34

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: as soon as its branch has become tender and sprouts its leaves, you know that summer is near; so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus again used the familiar fig tree imagery His audience already understood from the prophets.

† The lesson wasn't about the rebirth of a modern nation thousands of years later. It was about recognizing the covenant signs that would lead to the fulfillment He promised that generation.

† Jesus removed all doubt by declaring that "this generation" would witness every one of these events.

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither

can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

† Under the New Covenant, our focus isn't a national fig tree but Christ, the true vine. (John 15:1)

† Believers bear fruit by abiding in Christ, not by trusting in covenant ancestry or outward religion. (John 15:4-5; Philippians 3:3)

† The fruitful life of the New Covenant comes only through union with Christ. (John 15:5, 8; Galatians 5:22-23)

Historical References

† Jeremiah, Hosea, and Micah consistently used the fig tree as a covenant symbol of Israel centuries before Christ.

† Jesus continued the prophetic imagery rather than creating a new symbol, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

† The Jewish historian Josephus records the devastation of Jerusalem in AD 70, confirming the fulfillment of the covenant judgment Jesus foretold in the Gospels.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't search for prophetic signs in a modern nation because Christ fulfilled everything He promised concerning that covenant generation.

† Believers today are called to abide in Christ and bear spiritual fruit because we already live under the blessings of the New Covenant. (John 15:1-8)

† The mystery of the fig tree reminds us that God always keeps His covenant promises exactly as He declared.

Q & A Appendix

Q: What did the fig tree represent throughout Scripture?

A: The fig tree represented God's covenant people, Israel, and their spiritual condition. (Jeremiah 24:1-10; Hosea 9:10)

Q: Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

A: Jesus acted out a prophetic judgment against fruitless covenant Israel, not against a random tree. (Matthew 21:18-19; Luke 13:6-9)

Q: Does the fig tree in Matthew 24 represent the modern nation of Israel?

A: No. Jesus continued the prophetic symbol already established in the Old Testament and declared that all those events would occur within "this generation." (Matthew 24:32-34)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Jeremiah 24:1-10, Hosea 9:10, Micah 7:1-2, Luke 13:6-9, Matthew 21:18-19, Matthew 24:32-34

† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book 6

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