



What Did Jesus Say About Israel?

Luke 13:6: (NASB) *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.*



Special Guest: David Stein

Jesus taught us about many things. He taught us how to live, what to focus on, how to be a good neighbor, how to be selfless. He taught us what the most and least important things are. He taught us the simplicity of faith and the magnificence of faith in God. Jesus also taught us about being chosen of God and all that such choosing entails. On this program we look at what Jesus taught us about the chosen nation of Israel by use of the example of a fig tree. This is a part of his teaching that rarely gets much attention.

Our guest, David, is an elder with the Allentown Bible Students in Pennsylvania. He has been a co-host on other Christian Question programs. His comments will be paraphrased in purple throughout this Rewind.



1. Where was the first fig tree in scripture located?
2. What are the first three agricultural crops mentioned in the Bible?

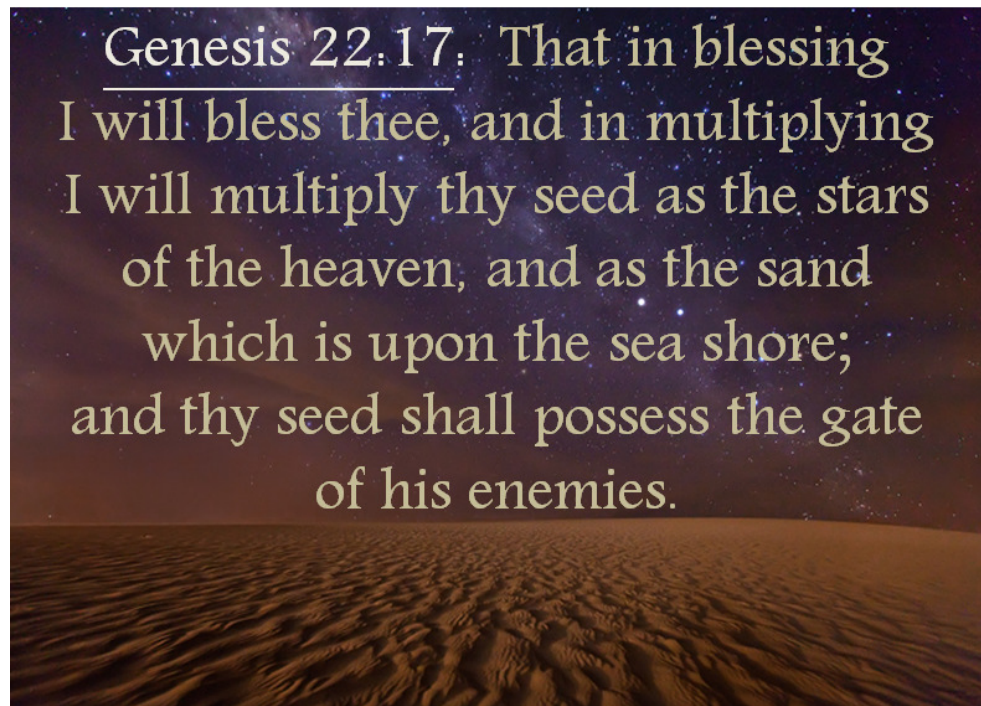
Let's use a simple parable as our basis for looking into Jesus' perspective:

Luke 13:6-9: (NASB) 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.* 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?* 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;* ⁹*and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.*

There are two important symbols here: a vineyard where the fig tree is located and the fig tree. Both of these symbols were often repeated in Scripture. We think they represent God's chosen ones from two aspects - the spiritual aspect (vineyard) and the natural aspect (fig tree).



These two aspects go all the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant. Remember when God promised to Abraham that in his seed *all families of the earth would be blessed*? He described the seed in two parts: like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the seashore.



Here is the same theme: the heavenly/spiritual part (stars) and the earthly/natural part (sand).

When we look at Jesus' understanding of and teaching on Israel, this is an important backdrop. Jesus was a Jew, so he understood the Abrahamic Promise as being the foundational promise that brought forth Israel. This promise was repeated over and over again to each generation.

Now back to our parable in Luke. What is Jesus telling us about Israel? Jesus said a lot of things right from the Old Testament.

That is an important thing for us to recognize in order to be good students of the Bible. Jesus was given supernatural information, but by and large that is not the case. You can trace many things Jesus said all the way back to the Old Testament. For example, when he was talking about Israel's future, he referenced Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

This was a well-studied mind drawing Old Testament prophecy into place and clarifying it for us.

Jeremiah 8:1-2: (NASB) ¹*At that time, declares the LORD, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. ²They will spread them out to the sun, the moon and to all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served, and which they have gone after and which they have sought, and which they have worshiped. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground.*



This illustrates the general principle that when you are in covenant relationship with God, if you obey that covenant, good things are going to happen. If you disobey that covenant, bad things are going to happen. By way of illustration, we mentioned Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:1,5,17: (KJV) ...¹*if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God...* ...⁵*Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. (if not)* ...¹⁷*cursed shall be thy basket and thy store.*

The Law Covenant with Israel was very much a covenant of prosperity. That is how you knew God was blessing you. It is different when we look at the spiritual aspect. The blessings are a little bit different - spiritual prosperity - but for natural Israel, it was *physical* prosperity. The Scripture we just read shows they had gone over to worshipping stars in gross idolatry.

Being the chosen people didn't mean it would be a bed of roses!

Amos 3:2: (NAS) *You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

There is responsibility that comes with being in covenant relationship with God.

Sinful, idolatrous things had been done in Judah - to what consequence?

Jeremiah 8:12-13: (NASB) ¹²*Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, and they did not know how to blush; therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time of their punishment they shall be brought down, says the LORD. ¹³I will surely 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.*

...*they don't even know how to blush*: This is not talking about just mistakes. God is very forgiving and sometimes we just end up doing things we don't really want to do. But that is not the behavior talked about here. These are choices deliberately contrary to what God said and an attitude where they didn't even care about it. The attitude was completely perverted.

The consequence was *no grapes on the vine* and *no figs on the fig tree*. Israel becomes idolatrous in both aspects of their lives - the physical and the spiritual - and suffers dramatically.

Jesus probably picks up on this very Scripture as he starts to talk about the vineyard, grapes and the fig tree.

What are the properties of a fig tree?

It is a very unusual tree in that one of the three crops it gives you every year appears before the leaves. How many fruit trees have you seen where there is fruit before the leaves?

There are characteristics about a natural fig tree God uses to show us what is happening in His plan.



So, how long do you wait for a fig tree to bring forth fruit?

Here is the basis of the fig tree - the first mention of the Abrahamic Promise:

Genesis 12:1-3: (NASB) *¹Now the LORD said to Abram, go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; ²And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*

As the promise is repeated, it gets more detailed and developed (stars/seashore, etc.) Israel is the offspring of Abraham. Israel now has a special place in God's plan because of the fact God promised something to Abraham. We will look at that in greater detail later in this program. It is important to remember the seed of Abraham is being blessed - not because it was great or wonderful or different than anybody else - but because of God's promise.

Luke 13:6-7: *...and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. ⁷And 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?*

How can Israel be a source of blessing for all the families of the earth in the Abrahamic Promise when here Jesus is talking about cutting down the fig tree? That sounds pretty permanent!

In a sense it is. The way God deals with the people on earth is through "dispensational truth," meaning God is dealing with certain people a certain way at a certain time and doing something different during another period of time.

Do God's methods change as time goes on? God never changes. This is a plan He came up with a long time ago. Remember we talked about both the spiritual (vineyard) and natural (fig tree) aspects of the covenant. That applies to the time dispensations we are talking about as well. The "Jewish Age" was a period of about 1,845 years that ended in the time of Jesus. During that time, Israel was God's *special possession*, the most special people on earth. This was not only because of the Abrahamic Covenant, but later the Law Covenant that organized them around this special Mosaic Law they had. But they repeatedly proved unfaithful to it and had problems with the Canaanites and others in the land. Every time they were harried, it was a result of being unfaithful to the covenant. Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, destroyed the city in 606 BC and took people away.

So, it is important to realize God changes His methods as time goes on because different periods of time warrant different approaches to accomplish the overall plan. Exactly right. And that fig tree we associate with the Jewish Age, now Jesus was introducing something new - the spiritual aspect. Now we come into the "vineyard phase" which begins the "Gospel Age," which is very distinct in the way God deals with His people from the Jewish Age.



This shows a dispensational change because there is a different method to accomplish the same plan. It is like playing a football game using a different strategy in the fourth quarter than you did in the first quarter. You want to win the game and the strategy changes depending on where you are in the game.

Old Testament reference to the ever-present challenge of idolatry:

Hosea 9:10: (NRSV) Like *grapes* in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the *first fruit on the fig tree*, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

This shows both the grapes (spiritual blessing) and the figs (the natural national blessing) came into jeopardy because of idolatry.

Jeremiah 24:1-10: (KJV) ¹The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. ²One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. ³Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. ⁴Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, ⁵Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. ⁶For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. ⁷And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. ⁸And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: ⁹And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. ¹⁰And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.



Jeremiah 24 discussing good figs and bad figs (King James Version calls them naughty figs!) references a time when God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish Israel. The good figs are those He preserved into Babylon. He was still protecting His people even though there was a punishment going on. The bad figs are those who were destroyed. **Jeremiah 24** and **Hosea 9:10** show we have a biblical basis for assigning the fig tree to Israel.

Jesus used the fig tree as a picture of Israel because scriptural precedent showed him to teach this way.

There are three crops of figs produced by the tree each year. Winter figs are produced near the end of its growing season, like a sputtering crop. Winter figs weren't cultivated or harvested; mostly they were left on the trees. They weren't a particularly high quality fig; although sometimes a winter fig could be coaxed all the way to the spring and it would be better. It was a crop that was generally rejected and not used.



There are three phases of harvest with the fig tree. If the fig tree represents Israel, logic would say the three phases of harvest put together would tell the story of Israel.

The wonderful thing about this fact is God had to create the fig tree. He had to create the DNA and the genetics to have these characteristics and features. He did this however long ago creation occurred with the history of Israel already in mind. What wisdom and foreknowledge!

John the Baptist preaching to the "fig tree" (Israel) - repent!

Matthew 3:1-2: (NASB) ¹Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ²Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This was a time for them to have a reckoning with God. We know now that it was coming to the end of the Jewish Age. Not that God would reject them forever, but rejection for a time was coming up. The preaching of John the Baptist was perhaps one last time to say, "Wake up! There is going to be something momentous happening!" Of course, he is introducing Jesus coming on the scene.

But John goes further, and this is interesting, based on the parable Jesus taught about cutting the fig tree down:

Matthew 3:7-10: (NASB) ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; ⁹and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

This reflects the same attitude problem we discussed before. *We have Abraham for our father* - the Israelites were saying the same thing before Nebuchadnezzar, bragging they were in covenant relationship with God and had the Temple, so nothing could happen to them. Not so! There would still be responsibility for what they had done.

Suggested symbolism:

Fig Tree = physical nation of Israel developing

Vine/branches = spiritual nation of Israel (the true church) developing

We can run into that same problem, by saying, "Well, I've given my life over to the Lord, so everything is fine! I'm in great shape. I'm impervious."

Personal responsibility means we have to obey God and His commandments. We will be just as culpable to punishment if we do not.

Just as Israel had to be very aware of what they did, said and thought, just because we have promised our lives to God through Christ, it does not matter unless we *live* it.

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees - We mentioned God's punishment back when Nebuchadnezzar came. Another punishment was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. When Jesus was talking about this in Matthew 24, he said something specific related to the fig tree:



Matthew 24:20: (KJV) *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter... (winter figs did not produce)*

There is a connection here with the crop that was rejected. Israel was rejected - they were not producing the fruits befitting of them.

So would we say the winter fig crop represents Israel at the time of Jesus? Yes, they were a nation that was not ready. They had professions but not realities, and because of all the corruption that existed there, they were cut off and not harvested. They *should* have been ready. All the pieces were in place. John the Baptist came and said "It is time," but they were not ready to follow through.

What happens when the fig tree does not respond?

Luke 13:8-9: (NASB) 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; ⁹and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.*

Does this picture show a permanent severing of favor for Israel?

Why did Jesus literally wither a fig tree?

Mark 11:12-14: (NRSV) ¹²*On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴He said to it, may no one ever eat fruit from you **again** <165>. And his disciples heard it.*

The tree just was not ready to produce any fruit - it was out of season. If we believe Israel has not been eternally cast off from God's favor, and in light of the mess they are in right now with Gaza, how do we put this curse from Jesus in perspective?

Again: Strong's #165, aiōn, 1. For ever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity;
2. The worlds, universe; 3. Period to time, age

This translation lacks a little bit. If you look in the Greek, a better translation would be, "No one will eat this fruit to the Age." Until the "Millennial Age" when Israel comes back into favor again, they would be rejected. The cutting down of the tree shows the abandonment of their national house, but not forever. The cutting down really shows the destruction that occurred in 70 AD rather than the permanence of it.

There is one other thing: *Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf* - if there are leaves on a fig tree, you expect to find that second crop of fruit, the "early ripe figs." Remember that a characteristic of the fig tree is that the fruit is produced before the leaves. So, Jesus looking in the distance sees the tree in leaf and his expectation is there will be figs on it.

Out of season - it is a little early for first ripe figs. About that time you would have had barley coming in, then wheat, then the first ripe figs, so it would have been a little early. Notice, though, it says *in leaf*. It gives us that detail because it helps us to understand this. The cursing of the tree is a completely strange thing for Jesus to do unless you understand the symbolism involved.

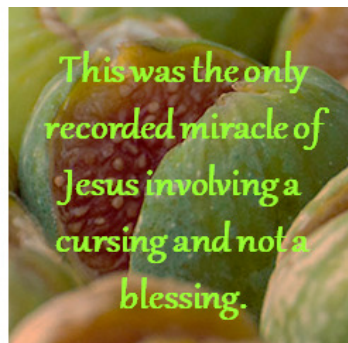


It is a serious consequence of the rejection of Messiah at this point in time. One more thing regarding the judgment coming on the Jews at that time: Certainly they rejected him - at least the religious leaders. The people seemed to love Jesus; they were very supportive of him. Those who were in control did not. So, the judgment was coming upon them in particular. But it wasn't only for that rejection of Jesus. In Matthew 23, Jesus pointed out they had a history of this! They had been killing God's prophets and rejecting God's message from Abel to Zechariah! So the judgment would come upon this generation.

Matthew 23:34-36: (NIV) ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

In between what we read about Jesus withering the fig tree, he cleanses the Temple and here is what happens afterwards:

Mark 11:20-24: (NRSV) ²⁰In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹Then Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered. ²²Jesus answered them, have faith in God. ²³Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea, and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. ²⁴So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.



Withered away to its roots. Does this show a permanent destruction?



It is not going to be a permanent condition for the natural seed of Abraham. But it does express just how thorough the judgment is going to be on them. They were dried up! They had completely lost spirituality, and we don't have to go into all the things the Scribes and Pharisees told Jesus, but they were lacking in spirituality. It is interesting that in between the cursing of the fig tree and the noticing of the effect of that - the drying up - you have the cleansing of the Temple. I believe these events are related.



Footnote in the Life Application Study Bible, New Living Translation:

Mark 11:11-21: "The cursing of the fig tree was an acted-out parable related to the clearing of the Temple. The Temple was supposed to be a place of worship, but true worship had disappeared. The fig tree showed promise of fruit, but it produced none. Jesus was showing his anger at religious life without substance. If you claim to have faith without putting it to work in your life, you are like the barren fig tree..."

Jesus cleansed the Temple - he showed all of the bad things going on there. Then he said *if you say to this mountain... what mountain?* The Temple was on Mount Moriah! He said it would be *thrown into the sea*. What happened to the Temple on Mount Moriah? It was thrown down by the Romans until there was not even one stone upon another. They completely wiped out everything related to the Temple.

It was a very thorough rejection, just as thorough as the acceptance of Israel was over a period of 1,845 years, the rejection would be essentially the same amount of time. That is why he described it as *winter* - you had God's chosen people for 1,845 years and now there would be a double, meaning the same period of disfavor. That is why Jesus uses such strong language. He was telling them they would have massive trouble for as long a time into the future as they had favor in the past.

This judgment message was given by Jesus in 33 AD, at the end of that first period of 1,845 years. We will see where the matching period ends up and that will give us more evidence that in fact favor has been returning.



Producing fruit is really important to the Lord! There was an expectation of fruit when Jesus saw the tree with leaves.

If you profess to have figs, produce figs!

Jesus condemns words without acts. If we put forth just leaves or sour fruit, we will not be allowed to remain in the garden of the Lord.

Please refer back to our recent programs on Fruit of the Spirit for more on this important topic:

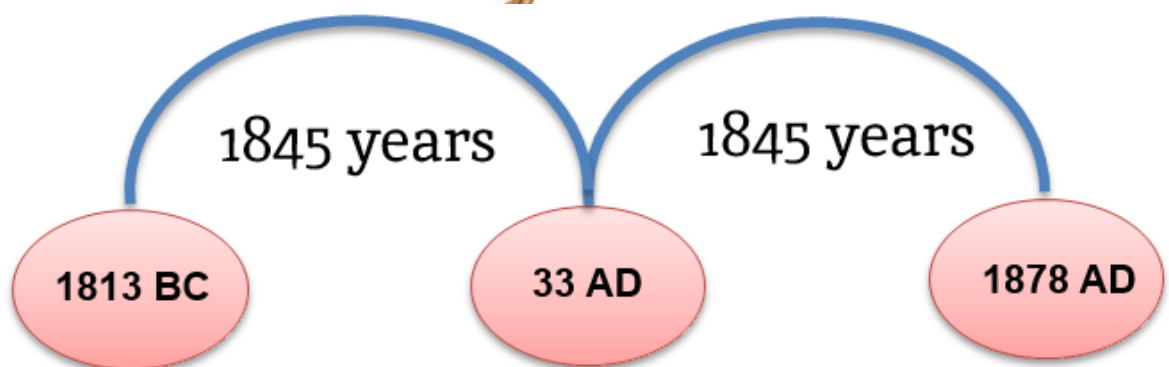
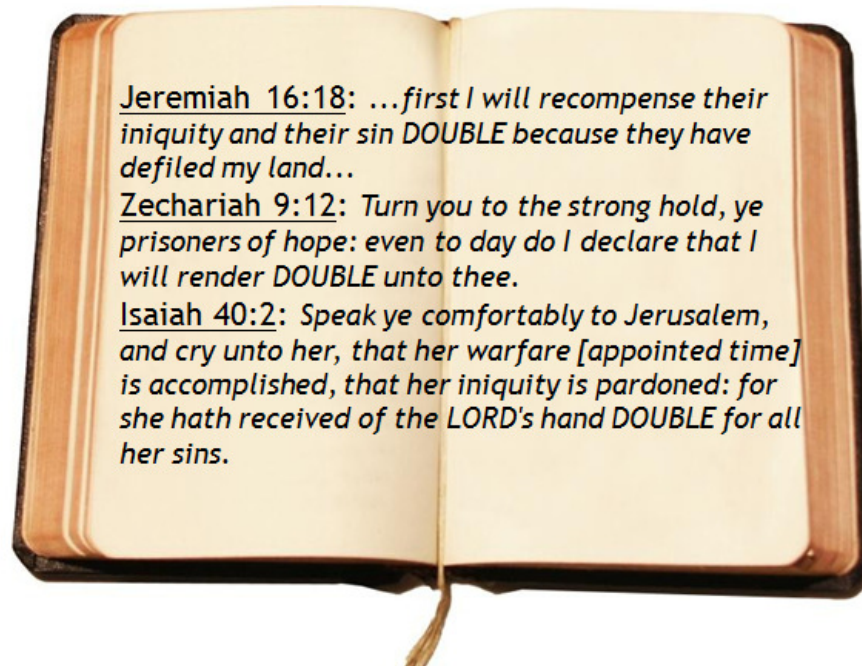
What is the Fruit of Your Life? (Part I) - May 18, 2014

What is the Fruit of Your Life? (Part II) - June 29, 2014

The head of the *fleshy* house was Jacob. Through his twelve sons he founded the nation of Israel. The head of the *spiritual* house is Jesus. Through his twelve apostles he founded spiritual Israel, the church.

Three scriptures refer to Israel's period of disfavor as a "double" or repetition of their period of favor:

Israel's Double



Genesis 49: When Jacob (also named "Israel") died, God's *favor* extended to his twelve sons and their progeny.

Matthew 23:38: "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." Israel's national rejection of Messiah begins a period of 1845 years of God's *disfavor*.

Petah Tikvah established; formal period of disfavor ends; Israel begins returning to the Land.



1. Where was the first fig tree in Scripture located? *There was a fig tree in Eden because Adam and Eve used fig leaves as coverings! Genesis 3:7: (NIV) Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

The casting off of Jerusalem:

Matthew 23:37-38: (NRSV) ³⁷*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸See, your house is left unto you, desolate.*

Jesus doesn't talk about Israel as a fig tree a lot, but what he does say is incredibly powerful. He tells us they were coming to a tipping point - favor went on in spite of their lack of devotion to the Almighty. Now he was there and they rejected him, so there would be a period of disfavor. It would be a long period of time during which their house would be left desolate.

It shows the covenant arrangement God made with Israel specifically (the Mosaic Law Covenant) would be suspended as far as God is concerned. *Your house is left unto you desolate* means "I'm not dealing with you anymore." Is that forever? Verse 39 in that same text gives us the answer:

Matthew 23:39: (NRSV) *For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth **till** ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

So there is hope later.

Did Jesus tell us that Israel was being replaced?

1 Peter 2:7-10: (NASB) ⁷*This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone, ⁸and, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.*

So, unbelieving Israel is separated out in this verse as disobedient. New favor is given to the followers of Christ, shown to us in the picture of the vine and the branches.

⁹*But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Even when we look at the history of the first century, the fleshly seed of Abraham had an exclusive invitation to "come into the vineyard" arrangement for three and a half years after Jesus died.

The first Gentile convert, Cornelius, was the first evidence that something had changed dramatically. It required a vision from heaven for the Apostle Peter to be able to understand that!

We see that Jesus, in talking about Israel as pictured in the fig tree, tells us a lot in a few words. He tells us they were in trouble and they would reject God because they rejected Jesus, but that's not the end of the story. Jesus tells us that as well. What future role does Israel play to bless the nations?



Suggested symbolism:

Fig Tree = physical nation developing

Vine/branches = spiritual nation developing

Olive Tree = the combined family of God's chosen ones as blessers



2. What are the first three agricultural crops mentioned in the Bible?

Figs (fig tree) - Adam and Eve used fig leaves in the Garden

Olives (olive tree) - a dove brought Noah back an olive branch

Grapes (vineyard) - after leaving the ark, Noah planted a vineyard and drank fermented grapes

Here we now focus on the grapes and vine portion of the symbols:

Jesus proclaimed a new way - where does this leave Israel?

John 15:1-11: (NASB) ¹*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every 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. ³You are already clean because of the word, which I have spoken to you.*

Is this a similar pattern to that which natural Israel was developed under? Are there differences between how natural Israel was developed as compared to "spiritual Israel?"

In introducing himself as *the true vine*, Jesus was going to take all that was learned to a different level. God doesn't change, so all the principles, covenants and laws God gave Israel now were going to be lifted up. We saw how Jesus did this when he talked about various parts of the Law.

There was a higher focus based on the teaching and life of Jesus. Yes, and the focus now was spiritually. We contrasted spiritual prosperity vs. natural prosperity. Jesus never promised any of his followers that if we obeyed him, our crops would grow great and we would never have a hailstorm. Those kinds of promises *were* given to Israel but not to Christians. But what he does promise is he would be with us always, he would help us to develop the fruit of the Spirit, and he would invite us to something he never invited Israel to - a heavenly reward.

⁴*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*

Are these similar results to what Israel was developed under? Are there differences? This sounds like the favor of Israel has been replaced with the favor of Christianity.

This is a terrible judgment message on Israel. Jesus is saying: God is removing His favor from you. You used to be His prized possession. So have we replaced Israel? Replacement is an interesting word here. God from the very beginning



knew there would be something higher and nobler, namely membership in the body of Christ. Israel was intended to take that progression, so when Jesus came on the scene, Israel should have been ready to embrace him and take the next step into the higher and deeper lessons. But they were not ready and as a consequence, were cast off as a nation. The national covenant no longer applied to them. Then he began to bring in the Gentiles. Was that a replacement? In one sense, yes, but in a more important sense, no. Israel, although they have been cast off, they have not been cast off forever. We will see Scriptures in Romans 10 where Paul discusses this very specifically. It is a "set aside" arrangement during the 1,845 years of the Gospel Age we will talk about later.

In the Old Testament, Israel was symbolized by both the fig tree AND the vineyard. In the New Testament, there is a symbol of the vineyard, but there is no mention of a fig tree in reference to Christianity. It gives us the sense that there is something additional going on, but Israel as a fig tree is still in effect, though withered.

"Replacement Theology" likes to take Israel out of the picture completely. But there is a fundamental issue. Think if you were Abraham, and God says "I'm going to bless your seed." What are you thinking? Your natural seed, of course. So God promised me that, this is what I expect. As it turns out, God had a lot more in mind that Abraham had no knowledge of. So God is going to add to His promise far, far more. If Israel was cast off forever, what would Abraham think? God's faithfulness is on the line and He is always faithful to His word.

Israel has not been replaced; the spiritual part of the Covenant is now being focused through Christianity - God is choosing a "bride class" for Christ, also called the "church class" or "body of Christ." Israel was given exclusive rights to that invitation early on, so the entire church class could have come exclusively through Israel had they not rejected Jesus. In fact a large number of Jews at that time did in fact take advantage of that. Israel did not do so nationally, though, so they were set aside.

Up to three and a half years after the crucifixion and ascension of Jesus, all of Christianity was of Jewish descent. The conversion to Christianity was on an individual basis, not a national one. The withering of the fig tree was the withering of national favor, but an individual could still answer the call.

A New Testament view helps us to see the process that God's plan of salvation had in place.

Galatians 3:19-22: (NASB) ¹⁹Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. ²⁰Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. ²¹Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²²But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.



The mediator of the Law for Israel was Moses - the mediator of grace for the world is Jesus!

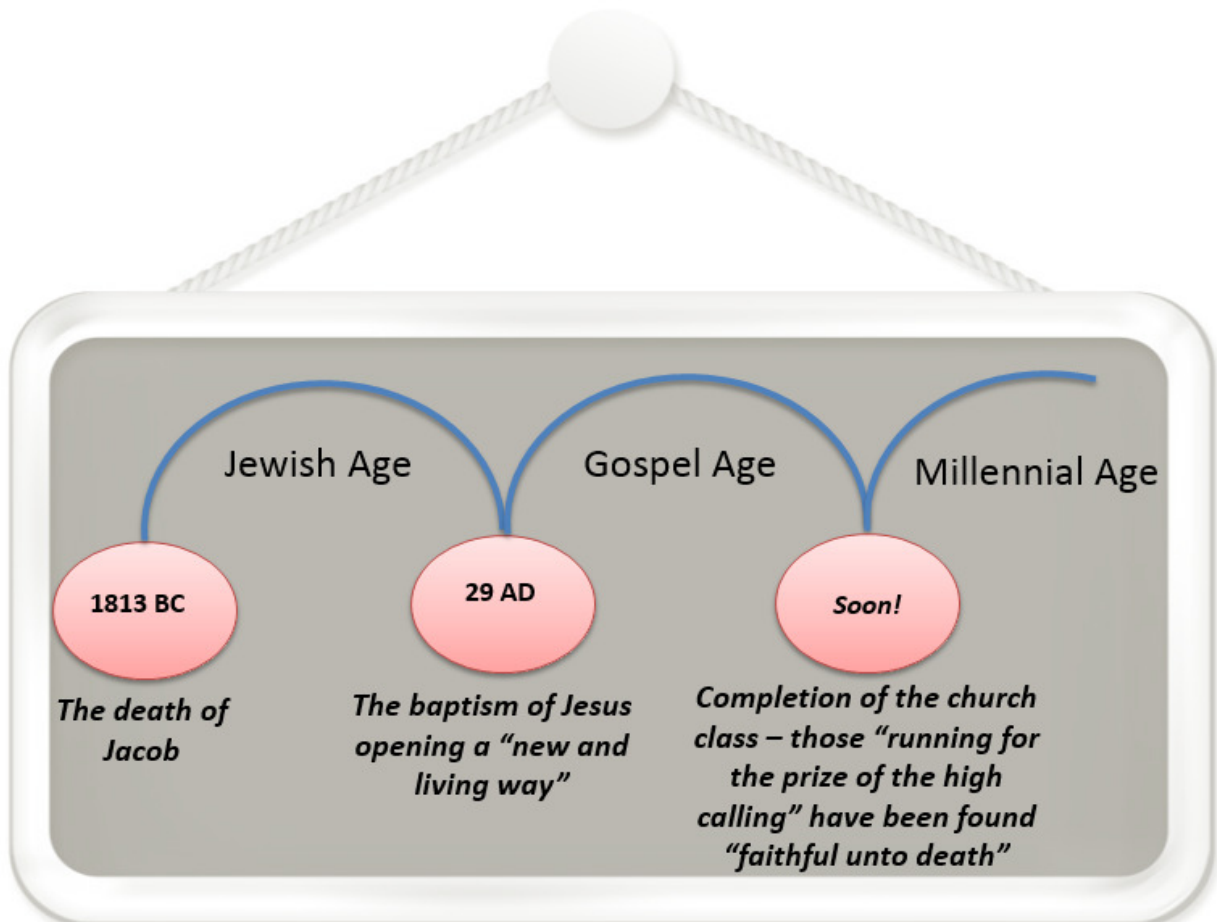
Romans 3:19-21: (NASB) ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. ²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.

This focuses on how important the Law is, but then it says there is something beyond the Law. How do you put those two things together?

First a footnote: *by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified* - when Adam and Eve sinned, they became aware of their sin and they tried to justify themselves. What did they do? They put fig leaves on. That's right! Do you see the connection here with fig trees and Israel, even in terms of the Law? Israel thought they could be justified by obeying God's Law, just like Adam and Eve putting the fig leaves on. They needed something else as the problem was not the Law, it was human imperfection.

Earlier you talked about a dispensational approach to things (God dealing with specific people or nations in specific defined timeframes). The Law is there to define sin, but then grace is there to lift us above sin and follow something even higher.

The natural fig harvest represents different phases of God's dealing with Israel:





	<p>Fig tree Natural Israel and its phases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Winter harvest (poor crop not ready to really harvest; representing Israel not ready at Jesus' first advent)- First ripe figs (favor returns from the "old wood" of the Law Covenant; representing those of natural Israel, those descendants of Abraham who are faithful and love God's promises.)- Summer figs (grow on the "new wood" of the New Covenant; representing the fullness of God's blessing on the nation of Israel after their blindness is removed)
---	---

Hosea 2:15: (KJV) *And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor <5911> (In English means "trouble") for a door <6607> (Hebrew word "pethach") of hope <8615> (Hebrew word "tikva"):* and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in *the* day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

In 1878, for the first time, Jewish people were allowed to own land in the Promised Land. The very first settlement was called Petah Tikvah.

But doesn't Israel have to accept Christ to have God's blessing? Remember the first ripe figs grow on the old fruit. This is fruitage under the remnants of the old wood of the Law Covenant. The big crop we will discuss soon is under New Covenant fruitage.

We understand Israel's blindness to be lifted *after* they are regathered in the land.

We have talked about fig trees and grapevines - what about olive trees?



It is important to spend time in Romans 11. Here it discusses Israel in terms of the picture of an olive tree.

Romans 11:13-36: (NRSV) ¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry ¹⁴in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! ...

How does their rejection bring reconciliation for the world? When Jesus began his ministry, his teaching

intended to go out to the whole world. God was calling *a people for His name* who would be part of the body of Christ. As part of the body of Christ, they will be kings, priests and rulers for the whole world in the kingdom. This Gospel Age has been a time when individuals are being gathered into that body of Christ. We believe that body will be complete in the near future, and then God's kingdom - with these wonderfully developed and Christ-like kings will begin to help bless the whole world. The Gospel Age is really the time that group is put together. (The vine and the branches)



¹⁶If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. ¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. ...

What is the *rich root of the olive tree*? How is it shared? We are now talking about the all-encompassing covenant now that brings the fig tree and the vine pictures together. This is a different picture showing a full and completed state. (The finished plan of the blessing of the world.) The tree roots are the root of the Abrahamic Covenant. Remember when we saw the Abrahamic Covenant - it was intended to be a blessing for ALL nations - everyone.

...some of the branches were broken off - this is Israel. They were not measuring up to what was expected, so they were broken off.

... wild olive shoot - the Gentiles, who were never part of the original Abrahamic Covenant, but who are now being grafted in.

¹⁹You will say, branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. ²⁰That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. ²²Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ...

Had Israel not been unfaithful to the coming of Messiah, we as Christians would not have had this opportunity. That should keep us humble and grateful.

Faithfulness and obedience to God will result in blessing. Unfaithfulness and disobedience result in punishment. Paul uses the example of Israel to make that point. We have been specially called and blessed but that is not to make us proud. We are to *stand in awe* and be faithful.

Some Christian denominations believe "once in grace, always in grace," but this says just like Israel was cast off from favor, we can be, too. We must be humble with this call to heavenly things.

Natural Israel and spiritual Israel (Christianity) have a part in the same plan:

*²⁴For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. ²⁵So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, **until** the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so **all Israel will be saved**; as it is written, Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. ²⁷And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins. ...*

The casting off of Israel into disfavor is not forever. Paul is very clear on this. **Back in Verse 23:** *even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. That is the return of favor. Verses 26 and 27:* *Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins. This is another very clear expression of God's favor returning to Israel.*

²⁸As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are



irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. ³³O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ³⁵Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

The Abrahamic promise to bless all the families of the earth comes through Israel and Christianity together. This will become more obvious as we move into the "end times" and into the Millennial Age. We are in the process of seeing the trouble that gives birth to incredible blessing.

	<p><i>Fig tree</i> Natural Israel and its phases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Winter harvest (poor crop not ready to really harvest; representing Israel not ready at Jesus' first advent) - First ripe figs (favor returns from the "old wood" of the Law Covenant; representing those of natural Israel, those descendants of Abraham who are faithful and love God's promises.) - Summer figs (grow on the "new wood" of the New Covenant; representing the fullness of God's blessing on the nation of Israel after their blindness is removed)
	<p><i>Vineyard</i> "Spiritual Israel," aka Christianity</p> <p>Natural Israel's spiritual privileges were removed because they would not produce grapes. See: <u>Isaiah 5:1-7</u> and <u>Matthew 21:43,45</u></p>
	<p><i>Olive Tree</i></p> <p>Both Jews and Christians grafted together. Its root is in the all-encompassing Abrahamic Covenant that brings all things together through Christ to bless all the families of the earth.</p>

Olive trees can grow over 20 feet tall, are evergreen and can live to be over 1,000 years old - what an appropriate symbol of everlasting life!



What part does Israel play in the future destiny of the world?

Galatians 3:29: (NIV) *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

What you inherit with the promise is the ability to bless all the families of the earth. Where does that leave Israel?

As a principle, God always is interested in dealing with those of faith. He is not interested in those who do not have faith in Him. Israel as a whole is under the Law Covenant.

The first ripe figs will be used of God, representing those of natural Israel, those descendants of Abraham who are faithful and love God's promises. As we read the modern history of Israel, we see faithful men and women in the Zionist movement that ultimately culminated in the gathering of Israel back in their homeland. The nation of Israel is still in darkness, still in blindness coming together.

What about this third harvest, the summer figs?

This is the big harvest the farmer likes, as this is where his profit comes from. It is a very large harvest and produces a lot of figs. It grows on the new wood.

Our suggestion is the summer figs appear to represent the fullness of God's blessing on the nation of Israel *after* their blindness is removed. They now have accepted Messiah as their king. They know who Jesus is. They understand the special position they have under the Law Covenant, and God makes with them a New Covenant:

Jeremiah 31:31: (NIV) *The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.*

This is a new covenant that will bring new life to them and to everyone that comes into that covenant relationship. How do we know that?

Israel - a beacon of light to the world:

Isaiah 62:1-2: (NASB) *¹For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. ²The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will designate.*

This is a beautiful picture, talking about Zion and Jerusalem. But, could this be focused just on Christianity? Could it be focused on Israel the physical nation as well?

It is hard to separate them out because of that olive tree picture. This is a Millennial Age prophecy here, when God's favor has returned and the blessing of prosperity *in basket and store* will be seen by all the nations. They will begin to accept it and want to be a part of it, but we mustn't leave out the fact that all these blessings are coming through that heavenly seed of Abraham - Jesus and his Church will be united and in power in heaven. They are in a spiritual position, ruling those that come back in the resurrection.



So the conduit of blessing for the nations is two-fold: Through natural Israel on earth (Abrahamic Covenant's sand of the seashore) and "spiritual Israel" (Abrahamic Covenant's stars of heaven) in heaven.

This happens through a doorway of trouble:

Joel 2:20-22: (NASB) ²⁰*But I will remove the northern army far from you, and I will drive it into a parched and desolate land, and its vanguard into the eastern sea, and its rear guard into the western sea. And its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up, for it has done great things.* ²¹*Do not fear, O land, rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done great things.* ²²*Do not fear, beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, for the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full.*

The time of trouble we see in the world today will continue up until the time God delivers Israel. It will be a mighty battle in the future. (We have discussed the prophecies of Psalms 83 and Ezekiel 38 in great detail in previous programs. Please search www.ChristianQuestions.com under "Israel" for archives on these end time prophecies.)

...the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full - Once God has delivered Israel from battle, then there is the full fig tree harvest (the summer harvest) and the full expanse of the heavenly government (spiritual Israel; Christ and his church) expanding their influence and blessings to the whole earth. This is expected to start in Jerusalem and then spread throughout the whole earth.

The fig tree and the vine are singled out as working together in full maturity.

Israel - the source of the "branch" and of physical and spiritual security:

Zechariah 3:8-10: (NASB) ⁸*Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you - indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch.* ⁹*For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.* ¹⁰*In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree.*

How does this show God's plan working through natural Israel and spiritual Israel? Remember that Joshua is another name for Jesus, so we have Jesus here. The number seven is always associated with divine judgment - either negative or positive judgment. This describes all judgment coming to an end and blessings are beginning to flow.

...every one of you will invite his neighbor - who is your neighbor? The whole human race! This is a picture happening on earth.

...to sit under his vine and under his fig tree - we find this expression elsewhere in Scripture, for example:

1 Kings 4:25: (NIV) *During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree.*

This describes an ancient time under King Solomon when there was peace. This was a picture of the Millennium!

Micah 4:4: (NIV) *Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.*



This is an Old Testament symbol for earthly peace and prosperity, but we understand the symbols of the vine and fig tree are the two parts that produce that earthly prosperity. We are talking about governments - a heavenly government and an earthly government. This government will not oppress the people, but will be a government really interested in everyone's peace, security and eternal blessings. The destiny of Israel is a major part of world history to come.

This really helps us to see that:

Zechariah 8:20-23: (NASB) ²⁰Thus says the LORD of hosts; it will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. ²¹The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will also go. ²²So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. ²³Thus says the LORD of hosts, In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

What a change in the attitude from today! With the current conflict in Gaza, people blame Israel for defending itself. It will be a lot different in the future kingdom when God will rule over everything. Nations will see the prosperity in Israel and will want to be a part of it.

Israel - blessed and honored of God:

Isaiah 44:1-5: (NASB) ¹But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen: ²Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you, do not fear, O Jacob My servant; and you Jeshurun whom I have chosen. ³For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants; ⁴And they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water. ⁵This one will say, I am the LORD'S; And that one will call on the name of Jacob; and another will write on his hand, belonging to the LORD, and will name Israel's name with honor.

Here are the summer figs! All nations come into the fig tree and become part of Israel with the blessings of the New Covenant. These are beautiful Scriptures showing they are taking those New Covenant obligations on themselves. They literally label themselves that they too belong to God. They came through the conduit of faithful, true Christianity and the nation of Israel - the descendants of Abraham. It is the ultimate reconciliation!

The purpose of the Millennium is to take every man, woman and child who has ever lived and bring them into a relationship with God.

The role of Israel in the world - today and yet future - is one of the most significant we can ever imagine. We live in exciting times. What is coming up is more trouble for Israel, but beyond that, when Israel's blindness is removed, the blessings will start to flow tremendously.



This is such an important aspect of our Christianity - to understand the role God has destined for the physical nation of Israel to play, along with the true followers of Christ in blessing the world. Look at the promise given to Abraham and how it is expanded throughout the Scriptures as it is repeated over and over. God does not make a promise He will not fulfill. Fulfillment comes from Israel as the fig tree, the true church as the vine and the branches and the two of them working together as the olive tree for goodness forever.

*So, what did Jesus say about Israel?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



*And now even more to think about...
only in the **Full Edition** of CQ Rewind!*



An Israeli army flare illuminating the sky above the northern Gaza strip on 17 July 2014. Israel and Hamas denied reports 17 July 2014 that they had agreed to a ceasefire, following a brief lull in hostilities for humanitarian reasons and after 10 nights and days of cross-border fighting that killed 231 Palestinians and one Israeli. (Mohammed Saber/EPA)

By Charles Krauthammer, Opinion writer July 17, 2014, WashingtonPost.com

Israel accepts an Egyptian-proposed Gaza cease-fire; Hamas keeps firing. Hamas deliberately aims rockets at civilians; Israel painstakingly tries to avoid them, actually telephoning civilians in the area and dropping warning charges, so-called roof knocking.

"Here's the difference between us," explains the Israeli prime minister. "We're using missile defense to protect our civilians, and they're using their civilians to protect their missiles."

Rarely does international politics present a moment of such moral clarity. Yet we routinely hear this Israel-Gaza fighting described as a morally equivalent "cycle of violence." This is absurd. What possible interest can Israel have in cross-border fighting? Everyone knows Hamas set off this mini-war. And everyone knows the proudly self-declared *raison d'être* of Hamas: the eradication of Israel and its Jews.

Apologists for Hamas attribute the blood lust to the Israeli occupation and blockade. Occupation? Does no one remember anything? It was less than 10 years ago that worldwide television showed the Israeli army pulling die-hard settlers off synagogue roofs in Gaza as Israel uprooted its settlements, expelled its citizens, withdrew its military and turned every inch of



Gaza over to the Palestinians. There was not a soldier, not a settler, not a single Israeli left in Gaza.

And there was no blockade. On the contrary. Israel wanted this new Palestinian state to succeed. To help the Gaza economy, Israel gave the Palestinians its 3,000 greenhouses that had produced fruit and flowers for export. It opened border crossings and encouraged commerce.

The whole idea was to establish the model for two states living peacefully and productively side by side. No one seems to remember that, simultaneous with the Gaza withdrawal, Israel dismantled four smaller settlements in the northern West Bank as a clear signal of Israel's desire to leave the West Bank as well and thus achieve an amicable two-state solution.

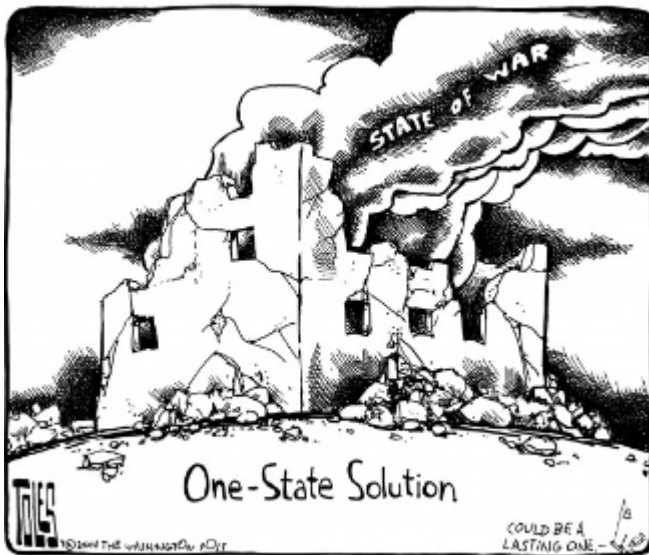
This is not ancient history. This was nine years ago.

And how did the Gaza Palestinians react to being granted by the Israelis what no previous ruler, neither Egyptian, nor British, nor Turkish, had ever given them — an independent territory? First, they demolished the greenhouses. Then they elected Hamas. Then, instead of building a state with its attendant political and economic institutions, they spent the better part of a decade turning Gaza into a massive military base, brimming with terror weapons, to make ceaseless war on Israel.

Where are the roads and rail, the industry and infrastructure of the new Palestinian state? Nowhere. Instead, they built mile upon mile of underground tunnels to hide their weapons and, when the going gets tough, their military commanders. They spent millions importing and producing rockets, launchers, mortars, small arms, even drones. They deliberately placed them in schools, hospitals, mosques and private homes to better expose their own civilians. (Just Thursday, the U.N. announced that it found 20 rockets in a Gaza school.) And from which they fire rockets at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Why? The rockets can't even inflict serious damage, being almost uniformly intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system. Even West Bank leader Mahmoud Abbas has asked: "What are you trying to achieve by sending rockets?"

It makes no sense. Unless you understand, as Tuesday's Post editorial explained, that the whole point is to draw Israeli counterfire.



This produces dead Palestinians for international television. Which is why Hamas perversely urges its own people not to seek safety when Israel drops leaflets warning of an imminent attack.

To deliberately wage war so that your own people can be telegenically killed is indeed moral and tactical insanity. But it rests on a very rational premise: Given the Orwellian state of the world's treatment of Israel (see: the U.N.'s grotesque Human Rights Council), fueled by a mix of classic anti-Semitism, near-total historical ignorance and reflexive sympathy for the ostensible Third World underdog, these eruptions featuring Palestinian casualties ultimately undermine support for Israel's legitimacy and right to self-defense.

In a world of such Kafkaesque ethical inversions, the depravity of Hamas begins to make sense. This is a world in which the Munich massacre is a movie and the murder of Klinghoffer is an opera — both deeply sympathetic to

the killers. This is a world in which the U.N. ignores humanity's worst war criminals while incessantly condemning Israel, a state warred upon for 66 years that nonetheless goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid harming the very innocents its enemies use as shields.

It's to the Israelis' credit that amid all this madness they haven't lost their moral scruples. Or their nerve. Those outside the region have the minimum obligation, therefore, to expose the madness and speak the truth. Rarely has it been so blindingly clear.