

### The Parable of the Fig Tree

Mark 13:28-31

Mark 13:28-31 - *“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. <sup>29</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>30</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”*

#### Background Notes

Mark 13 is the record of the Lord's Olivet Discourse. The subject of the discourse is the Second Coming of Christ and events leading up to His second Advent. The Olivet Discourse was given in response to the disciples' questions of verse 4: *“Tell us. When will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”* **When** will these things be, and **what** will be the sign? In verses 5-27 the Lord answered the second question – the **what**: *“What will be the sign..?”* There are two categories of signs - general signs and specific signs. In verses 5-13 the Lord gave some general signs that would characterize the times all the way from the 1st century right up to the Second Coming of Christ. In verses 14-27 the Lord gave some specific signs that would immediately precede His return.

In verse 28 the Lord answered the first question - the **when**: *“when will these things be?”* The Lord didn't give a date, and some students of the Bible are disappointed that He didn't. Many of wish He had said 2000AD - but He didn't! The Lord answered by giving a parable, “The Parable of the Fig Tree.” What did our Lord mean by this parable, and how does this answer the question, *“When will these things be?”*

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. The return of Israel is not a coincidence.

In verse 28 the Lord said: *“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.”* Notice that the Lord did not say, “Learn this *illustration* from the fig tree.” No, He said *parable*. A parable is more than just an illustration. The items mentioned in a parable represent something. They don't just illustrate something, they **represent** something.

We believe that the fig tree in this parable represents the nation of Israel. Back in Mark 11 we studied the miracle of the cursing of the fig tree. We saw there that the fig tree is used several times in Scripture as a symbol for the nation of

Israel. Israel is likened to a fig tree in Old Testament prophecy (Hosea 9:10). And there's another fig tree parable in Luke 13:6-7, and we saw that the fig tree clearly represented Israel.

In the miracle of the cursing of the fig tree, the Lord didn't curse the fig tree because He was angry at fruitless fig trees. No. The fig tree represented the nation of Israel, and the cursing of the fruitless fig tree dramatized God's dealings with the spiritually fruitless nation, Israel. Israel would be set aside because of its unbelief - for having only religious "leaves," but bearing no spiritual fruit. This prediction was fulfilled when the Roman armies overran the nation of Israel in 70 AD. The Temple was destroyed, the people were killed or dispersed, and the nation came to an end.

But now we have some good news in the Olivet Discourse: Israel will again become a nation! The "signs of life" of the nation, after a long winter of being dormant, would be a sign of His return. So the **when** of the disciples' question was being answered, not with a specific date, but with a specific sign—the return of the nation Israel. *"So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!"* (v29). Specifically, when we see leaves on the fig tree, or signs of life in Israel, then *"know that it is near—at the very doors."*

What's the "it" in the phrase *"know that it is near"*? Some translations have "**He**": "you'll know that **He** is near" —that is, the Lord's return. Well, that's certainly a proper translation. But the parallel passage in Luke 21:31 says, *"So you, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near."* So it seems, then, that "it" may be a better translation here, referring to the Kingdom of God. In any case, the return of Israel would certainly signal the threshold of the End Times, the Second Coming of the Lord, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on this earth when the Lord returns.

As you know, Israel became a nation again in 1948 after a long "winter" of almost 2000 years. The fig tree is putting forth leaves! It certainly appears that we are on the threshold of the End Times. We don't know how much time remains before the Rapture of the Church and the Tribulation, leading up to the Lord's return to earth to set up His kingdom, but these events can't be far off because Israel is once again a nation. The fig tree is putting forth leaves. The return of Israel is not a coincidence - it is a sign of the Second Coming of Christ.

Some Christians take the Old Testament prophecies that predict the return of the nation of Israel, and spiritualize these prophecies to the Church. The Church is the "new Israel," they say. Therefore, they say, the return of Israel, the rebirth of the nation of Israel is just coincidence. Well, I don't believe so. There are clear indications in Scripture that Israel is Israel – the Church is **not** the "new Israel." And we believe the return of Israel is **not** a coincidence - it is a specific sign of the Second Coming of Christ! We're on the threshold of the End Times and the Second Coming of Christ.

## 2. The duration of the Jewish people is not a coincidence.

Verse 30: *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”* “All these things” means not only the return of the nation of Israel, but all of those signs in the previous verses of the Olivet Discourse - particularly the specific signs in verses 14-27.

There have been various interpretations for the phrase “this generation.” Was the Lord talking about the Jews living in the 1st century? After all, they saw the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD - certainly a foretaste of coming future events. Or was the Lord talking about the people living at the End Times - the generation that would witness the rebirth of the nation Israel in 1948? A generation is about 40 years long, and 40 years added to 1948 equals 1988 - so the Lord should already have returned. (That’s why, by the way, there was a lot of stir in 1988 of people thinking, “Maybe this is the year that the Lord will return!” Well, as we know, He didn’t return in that year.)

Because the word **generation** can also be translated **race**, I think the best interpretation of this phrase, “this generation,” refers to the Jewish people - the Jewish “race” - from the 1st century right up until the End Times. In other words, in the whole context of the Olivet Discourse the Lord was saying that even though the Temple would soon be destroyed, the nation would come to an end, and the Jewish people would be scattered around the world, yet the Jewish people would not disappear from the face of the earth. They would endure right up to and into the end time.

It certainly is true that down through the centuries the Jewish race has continued to exist. Other races have perished from the earth, but not the Jews. Some people, like Hitler, have tried to exterminate the Jewish people, but they have failed. The Jewish people are still here - the Jewish race is still here - because God has preserved them. The duration of the Jewish people is not a coincidence. Verse 30 once again: *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation [the Jewish people, the Jewish race] will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”*

Unfortunately, throughout the centuries, most of the Jewish people have been an unbelieving “race.” They have not received their Messiah. Praise the Lord, Scripture indicates that there will come a spiritual awakening in Israel as we enter into the End Times, but it hasn’t happened yet. That, by the way, may be also what the Lord is implying there in verse 30—this unbelieving generation: *“Assuredly, I say to you, this [unbelieving] generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”* In any case, the duration of the Jewish people is not a coincidence. In fact, it is evidence of the eternal authority and accuracy of the Word of God. As verse 31 says, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.”*

## Practical Application

### Why not make a better investment of your time and money?

Verse 31: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”* Do we believe this? Do we **really** believe this? Then why do we invest so much of our time and money in what is only temporal – in that which has no eternal value? It’s really stupid, isn’t it?

We can understand why non-Christians would invest their time and money in temporal things and in this world that is passing away, because that’s all they have. But we’re Christians. We **know** that everything is temporal and passing away. We **know** that we can’t take it with us. We **know** that only what’s based on the eternal Word of God is permanent, is eternal and lasting. And yet so many of us fail to make a better investment!

The Lord Jesus said, *“My words will by no means pass away.”* Everything that the Lord Jesus said will come to pass, whether it was a prediction or a promise. Everything taught in the Bible is true, with no exceptions. Christians certainly believe that, as far as our salvation goes - right? We’re basing our eternal destiny on the truth of what the Bible says. We believe it to be true. We believe that when Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross 2000 years ago, our sins were being taken care of there—a transaction, a universal, historic transaction was taking place.

Well, if we believe God’s Word as far as our salvation goes, why don’t we make a better investment of our time and money, as far as our Christian life goes? Why do we waste so much time and money on earthly, temporal things that are passing away? I’m sure all of us could get along just fine with less time and money spent just on ourselves. We could invest more time and money in the work of the Lord, which will last forever – couldn’t we? I’m speaking to myself as well as to you.

Why don’t we make a better investment of our time and money?