

## The Parable of the Fig Tree Indicates the Time of His Return

### Matthew 24:32-39

Matthew 24:32-39 - *“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>33</sup> So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>34</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. <sup>36</sup> “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. <sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*

### Background Notes

Our Lord’s Olivet discourse was given in answer to the disciples’ questions about the future. In this section of the Olivet discourse the Lord gave some significant clues as to the time of His return. A lot has been written about this portion of the Olivet discourse, and two verses in particular have caused a lot of discussion.

One much-discussed verse is verse 34: *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place...”* What did our Lord mean by “this generation”? There are several different possible interpretations. One interpretation is that the generation that begins to see these end time events will live to see the Lord’s return. In other words, the end time events that are connected to the Lord’s return here in the Olivet discourse will not be stretched out over hundreds of years, but will take place during only one generation – about forty to fifty years, at most.

Another interpretation is that since the word “generation” in Greek can also be translated “race,” the Lord was saying that as a “race,” the Jewish people would not pass away, or be annihilated, but would continue right on until the end times. Still another interpretation is that the Lord was referring to that present unbelieving generation of the nation of Israel. In other words, the nation’s rejection of Jesus as their Messiah would continue right on until the end times. The spiritual revival and change of heart on the part of the Jewish people would not come until the end times. They would be an “unbelieving generation” or an “unbelieving race” all the way through - as indeed they have been. At the present time, I tend to go with the third interpretation, but the other interpretations are very good possibilities as well.

The other verse that has caused a lot of discussion is verse 36: *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”* What did our Lord mean when He said that even **He** didn't know the day or the hour of His return!? God is omniscient - He knows everything. If Jesus is God - how is this verse to be explained?

Answer: in the eternal counsels of God, it was determined that when the eternal Son of God became Man, He would voluntarily choose not to **use** – note the key word “use”- He would voluntarily choose not to **use** certain of His attributes at certain times. This verse does not mean that our Lord didn't have all the divine attributes! He was (and is) fully God as well as fully Man! He did not in any way give up His deity when He became Man, therefore He didn't give up any of His attributes of deity. But in the eternal counsels of God, it was divinely decided and decreed that the eternal Son, when He became Man, would not use His omniscience in certain areas and at certain times during His earthly ministry. However, as the glorified Son of God now, the Lord Jesus Christ certainly knows the day and hour of His return!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The condition of Israel is a sign of the return of the Lord.

*“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” (v32).* What did our Lord mean by this? Did the Lord just mean that when you see all the events that are mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter begin to take place, then you know that He is about to return? Or did our Lord have something more specific in mind?

I believe that He specifically had the nation of Israel in mind. The fig tree putting forth leaves is more than just a mere illustration of approaching end time events. The fig tree represents **Israel**. Remember, this is a parable, and the Lord's parables were **more** than mere illustrations. All parables have deeper meaning to them - in fact, that is the definition of a parable.

In this parable the fig tree represents Israel. And the idea of the “fig tree being Israel” is not just a wild guess! There are other places in the Bible where the fig tree represented Israel. In Hosea 9:10, referring to Israel, God said: *“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first fruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame, and they became an abomination like the thing they loved”* (emphasis added).

In Luke 13 our Lord likened Israel to a fig tree. *“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?’”* (Luke 13:6-7).

In this parable, the fig tree clearly represented Israel. The “*three years*” were the three years of our Lord’s public ministry, when He was looking for spiritual fruit in Israel. He found none, therefore Israel was “*cut down.*” Israel as a nation was temporarily set aside from the pace of God’s favor.

This setting aside of Israel was dramatized in the cursing of the fig tree in Matthew 21. Here again, in the Olivet discourse, a parable of a fig tree was given, and once again Israel is in view in the parable. The basic meaning is that the fig tree (Israel) will show signs of life once again, and when it puts forth leaves, then we will know that summer is near. In other words, keep your eye on Israel! When you see signs of life you will know that end time events are not too far ahead. Are there signs of life in Israel today? Answer: a resounding **yes!** In 1948, Israel became a nation once again, after 1900 years of dispersion and severe persecution. And the Jewish people continue to return to their homeland even during these days of trouble and terrorism in the Middle East.

Notice that our Lord didn’t say when the fig tree puts forth **fruit** you will know that summer is near. No, He said that when the fig tree puts forth **leaves**, you’ll know that summer is near. In our present day there is not great spiritual fruit in Israel, although it is increasing. The days of great fruit are yet to come in the future - and they will come! What a great day that will be!

But the leaves are coming forth now. The Lord said, when the fig tree shows signs of life, and it puts forth leaves (not fruit), you will know that summer is near. Folks, the leaves are there now. We are on the threshold of the end times! The condition of Israel is a sign of the return of the Lord.

## 2. The condition of society is a sign of the return of the Lord.

*“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (v37-39).*

In these verses the Lord says that, at the time of His return, conditions of society will be similar to the conditions of society at the time of Noah. What was society and culture like in the days of Noah? Well, we know that there was a lot of wickedness at that time. “*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). Conditions in our own day certainly parallel Noah’s day in wickedness, don’t they?

However, the main point that our Lord was making in these verses is that the people of Noah’s day were **unprepared** and **unconcerned**. They ignored the warnings of God given through Noah. They were going about their lives in a routine,

everyday way, with no awareness of imminent judgment. The great Flood came upon them suddenly - and took them all away!

In the same way, the return of the Lord will be sudden, and it will involve judgment. People will be unprepared and unconcerned. They will be going about life in a normal and routine way - eating, drinking, and marrying. The return of the Lord will come when they least expect it, and they will be taken away in judgment. So not only is the condition of Israel a sign of the return of the Lord, but the condition of society as well. The condition of society is a sign of the return of the Lord.

## Practical Application

**Read and study that which will never pass away.**

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (v35).* The “heaven” mentioned here is not the dwelling place of God, but the “heaven” of the planets and the stars. There’s coming a day when this present “heaven and earth” will pass away. **But the Lord’s words will never pass away!** The Lord’s words will never fail, and they will all come to pass!

The Lord’s words are contained in Scripture, the Bible. Why not read and study His words - the words that will never pass away? Why spend a lot of time reading other books, or watching movies, or programs and sports on TV? (And on and on we could go, right?)

Do you read and study the Bible? Do you have a systematic approach to Bible reading and study of God’s Word? Or do you just have a “hit or miss” approach to the Bible? Bible reading and Bible study doesn’t happen automatically. Try reading through the Bible in a year, for example. Have you ever tried that? It takes “sanctified willpower” to keep up with the schedule! Is it worth it? **Yes!** It’s certainly worth it!

The study of God’s Word has **eternal** value. Read and study what will never pass away!