

THE INTERPRETATIONS ON THE CURSED FIG TREE

(저주받은 무화과나무에 대한 해석)

Text: Mark 11:13

“Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs”(Mark 11:13) (καὶ ἰδὼν συκὴν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔχουσιν φύλλα ηεὶ ἄρα τι εὐρήσει ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐπ’ αὐτὴν οὐδὲν εὗρεν εἰ μὴ φύλλα· ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς οὐκ ἦν σύκων.)

[1] Realistic Interpretation: grammatical and historical setting

(1) Grammatical Interpretation:

1) **Bethphage(the house of figs):** Fig trees were no doubt plentiful in the neighbourhood of Bethphage.

[Con] This means that there are a lot of fig trees in the vicinity of Bethphage more than another trees.

2) **Matthew says he saw “one fig tree”(μὴν συκὴν):** more conspicuous.

[Con] This suggests there are another fig trees with their fruits in the vicinity of Bethphage even though un-ripened (green figs).

3) **Dean Stanley says that Mountain Olives is still sprinkled** with the fig trees (Sinai and Palestine, p. 418).

(2) Historical Interpretation:

“This fig tree had leaves, but no fruit; for it was not the season(time) of figs” (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς οὐκ ἦν σύκων.)

1) Not the season of fig tree:

① It was the end of March or the beginning of the April because the Passover was at hand according to the context.

- ② The season of fig tree must be divided into the two times: One is the **early** year, that is May to June, the other **later** figs August to October.
- ③ Other trees would all be bare at this early season, but the fig trees would be putting forth their broad green leaves.
- ④ While the **main crop** of figs does not ripen in the vicinity of Jerusalem until August, **smaller figs** begin to appear... as soon as the leaf buds are put forth... Even these **immature figs were eaten** by the peasants....The lack of any fruit on the tree was proof of its barrenness.

2) Possibility of no fruit:

- ① It is possible that this tree standing by itself as it would seem, was **more forward than the other fig trees around**. It was seen “from afar,” and therefore it must have had the full benefit of the sun.
- ② It would **be worse than any other trees, for there was not so much as one fig to be found upon it, though it was so full of leaves, or it was no good fig-year.**
- ③ **Smaller and larger figs:** In the region referred to here in Mark, the early or smaller figs, growing from the sprouts of the previous year, begin to appear at the end of March and are ripe in May or June. The later and much larger figs that develop on the new or spring shoots are gathered from August to October.

It is important to point out that the early figs, with which we are here concerned, begin to appear simultaneously with the leaves. Sometimes, in fact, they even precede the leaves.

[Con] On the Eastern side of the Mount of Olives fig trees can be seen in leaf at the end of March or the beginning of April. Only early green figs which actually appear before the leaves, could be expected at this time, and they are disagreeable in taste and are not ordinarily eaten. They are not ripe before June, and quite commonly they all fall off, so that after some days the fig tree has only leaves.

3) The time at the hand of Passover (about March to April)

① The time when either the early or the later figs are ripe had not yet arrived (the end of March). It was therefore “**not the season for figs.**”

② Jesus' mission schedule:

Saturday Evening: Supper in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper (14:3-9).

Sunday: Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and return to Bethany (11:1-11).

Monday: Cursing of the fig tree, cleansing of the temple, and exit from the city (11:12-19).

Tuesday: Conversation between Peter and Jesus, who teaches The Twelve the lesson of the withered fig tree and so on.

Wednesday: No events reported, unless the agreement between Judas and the chief priests(14:10, 12) took place on that day, but this may also have occurred a little earlier.

Thursday: Preparation for the Passover (including the night from Thursday to Friday).

[Con] Jesus puts the fig tree first, as being of its own nature the most forward to put forth its buds. But then it is peculiar to the fig tree that its fruit begins to appear before its leaves.

It was, therefore, a natural supposition that on this tree, with its leaves fully developed, there might be found at least some ripened fruit. He, therefore, approaches the tree in his hunger, with the expectation of finding fruit.

[2] Prophetic Interpretation: prophetic realism (symbolic action)

(1) The difficulties

Presented by this incident involving a fig tree covered with leaves but without fruit are well known. It is usually treated as a miracle of destruction, and the question naturally arises if the cursing of fig tree--for so Peter understands verse 14 (Ch. 11:21)--is really consistent with what is otherwise known of Jesus' character.

(2) The Juxtaposition of the two

Seemingly contradictory assertion in verse 13 heightened the difficulty, for the explicit statement that it was not the season for figs appears to make Jesus' action arbitrary and meaningless.

[Con] These problems have often been regarded as an insuperable obstacle to accepting the account in its present form.

(3) Resolution for these problems:

1) Mystical interpretation

- ① Local legend in the vicinity of the Bethany: a withered fig tree is too ordinary thing to give birth to a legend (asserted by M. J. Lagrange).
- ② Contingency: It is an unnatural incident but only a contingent incident because in spite of much plenty leaves it had no any fruit.
- ③ Parable account: the narrative had its origin in Jesus' parable of the unproductive fig tree(Lk. 13:6-9) has been transformed in the course of tradition into a factual account (H. van der Loos).
- ④ Textual problem: More commonly, the final clause of verse 13 regarded as a gloss, inserted at a time when it was believed that the incident occurred near the time of Passover; when the gloss is removed, the account gains credibility because it has reference to the time of the fig harvest, in close proximity to the Feast of Tabernacle.

[Con] But it is not necessary to resort to such expedients. Jesus evidently used his hunger as an occasion for instructing the Twelve. If the incident occurred in the period approaching Passover, the parenthetical statement in verse 13c is incontrovertible (indisputable) and suggests that Jesus had no expectation of finding edible figs.

2) Prophetic and Symbolic interpretation

"Jesus says "And he spoke to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand."(Luke 21:29-30)

Events have meaning beyond their face value; they become significant as they **are interpretation. The unexpected and incongruous (inconsistent) character of **Jesus' action** in looking for figs as a season when no fruit could be found, would **stimulate curiosity and point beyond the incident to its deeper significance.****

His act was an example of prophetic realism similar to the symbolic actions of the OT prophets frequently spoke of the fig tree in referring to Israel's status before God (e.g. Isa. 20:1-6; Jer. 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezk. 4:1-15). The prophets (Jer. 8:13; 29:17; Hos. 9:10; 16; Joel 1:7; Michah 7:1-6), while the destruction of the fig tree is associated with judgement (Hos. 2:12; Isa. 34:4; cf. Lk. 13:6-9).

① The fig tree symbolizes Israel in Jesus' day (Prophetic sign)

Firstly, Jesus had **"used the fig tree to set forth the judgement that was about to fall on Jerusalem (Jesus' action in the Temple is firmly embedded within the fig tree incident)**

Secondly. **Just as the leave of the tree concealed the fact that there was no fruit to enjoy, so the magnificence of the Temple and its ceremony conceals the fact that Israel has not brought forth the fruit of the righteousness demanded by God (scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites).**

[Con] Both incidents have the character of prophetic sign which warns of judgement to fall upon Israel for honoring God with their lips when their heart was far from him (cf. 7:6).

② The fig tree symbolizes Judaism in Jesus' day and today

Another **"action-parable"** had been **referred to Judaism** symbolized by the fig tree with no fruit. The Jews were this unprofitable fig tree, **full of the leaves of profession, but fruitless.**

When Jesus said unto (14) the fig tree, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever, He was pronouncing in symbol the certain doom of the Holy City (Jerusalem).

Christ was willing to make an example of it, not to the trees, but to the men, of the generation, and therefore cursed it with that curse which is the reverse of the first blessing.

③ Jesus' hunger desired for the fruits of fig tree: spiritual hunger

Nothing but his Divine yearning after the Jewish people, his spiritual hunger for their salvation, can explain this typical action with regard to the fig tree, and indeed the whole mystery of his life and death. (spiritual emblem).

[CON] The fig tree in this passage may be interpreted both by the grammatical, historical background and by the meaning of prophetic reality in the near future in the light of the Biblical method of interpretation. In Summary:

- (1) There are another fig trees with their fruits in the vicinity of Bethphage even though un-ripened (green figs).
- (2) While the main crop of figs does not ripen in the vicinity of Jerusalem until August, smaller figs begin to appear... as soon as the leaf buds are put forth... Even these immature figs were eaten by the peasants....The lack of any fruit on the tree was proof of its barrenness.
- (3) On the Eastern side of the Mount of Olives fig trees can be seen in leaf at the end of March or the beginning of April. Only early green figs which actually appear before the leaves, could be expected at this time, and they are disagreeable in taste and are not ordinarily eaten. They are not ripe before June, and quite commonly they all fall off, so that after some days the fig tree has only leaves.
- (4) It was, therefore, a natural supposition that on this tree, with its leaves fully developed, there might be found at least some ripened fruit. He, therefore, approaches the tree in his hunger, with the expectation of finding fruit.
- (5) The fig tree symbolizes Israel in Jesus' day (Prophetic sign)
- (6) The fig tree symbolizes Judaism in Jesus' day and today
- (7) Jesus' hunger desired for the fruits of fig tree symbolizes spiritual hunger