

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Matthew: Jesus As Israel's Messiah And His Kingdom

G. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Cursing Of The Fig Tree (Matthew 21:18-22)

I. Introduction

- A. When Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah at His triumphal entry in Matthew 21:1-11 and then when He purged the temple in Matthew 21:12-17, Israel as a nation did not believe in Him: the people said He was only a prophet from Nazareth (Matthew 21:10-11), and the Jerusalem religious leaders objected to the children in reference to Jesus in the temple crying out, "Hosanna to the son of David," a messianic term, Matthew 21:15.
- B. Israel's nationwide rejection of Christ led to another event in Matthew 21:18-22, one that explained why Israel failed to receive Christ, and it also provides a powerful lesson for us as believers in Christ today (as follows):

II. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Cursing Of The Fig Tree, Matthew 21:18-22:

- A. Matthew 21:18 reports that in the morning after the events of the previous day, Jesus returned to the city. Thus, what occurs in Matthew 21:19-22 has direct reference to the Matthew 21:1-18 failure of Israel to accept Jesus as the Messiah in His triumphal entry and the temple cleansing that occurred on the previous day.
- B. Accordingly, as He was returning to the city [of Jerusalem] in the morning, and was hungry, Jesus saw a fig tree beside the road and approached it to pick some figs to eat, Matthew 21:19a.
- C. However, He found no figs, but only leaves on the tree, Matthew 21:19b. Though other kinds of trees produce leaves long before they produce edible fruit, fig trees in the spring around Passover time as it was then also bear "early ripe figs" that appear **WHEN** the tree's **leaves** also **first appear** before they yield the main crop that ripens later in the year, Z. P. E. B., v. Two, p. 534; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Matthew 21:19.!
- D. Jesus was expecting to see this **normal** production of early ripe figs, but He found the tree had produced only leaves and no such early ripe figs, an **abnormality** for such a **fig** tree, Matthew 21:19c. Accordingly, Jesus cursed the tree, announcing that no fruit was to grow on it from that time forward, Matthew 21:19d!
- E. In the historical context, this event illustrates the fate of that generation in Israel that had rejected Christ:
 1. The Son of God and Messiah, Jesus, had come to Israel performing miracles predicted in passages like Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1 where the blind and the lame were healed (cf. Matthew 11:2-6) to signal the arrival of God's Messenger and Messiah. However, Israel as a whole in unbelief had failed to accept Him.
 2. Accordingly, God would judge that generation to miss the Kingdom, which judgment was leveled at Jerusalem in A. D. 70 with the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans. Israel, like the fig tree, had abnormally failed to produce the desired fruit of faith in Christ when He came, so, that generation was judged to miss the long-sought Messianic Kingdom just like Jesus cursed the fig tree no longer to be able to bear fruit!
- F. The disciples noticed how quickly the fig tree died: Matthew 21:19 ESV claims "it withered at once" and Mark 11:12-20 clarifies that it had dried up from the roots up by the next day, a rapid death for a tree! Thus, the disciples remarked their amazement at the rapidity of the fulfillment of Jesus' word, Matthew 21:20.
- G. Accordingly, Jesus used their interest to teach them the lesson behind the whole fig tree incident, the need for them to exercise faith in God and His Word for blessing opposite the experience of Israel, Matthew 21:21-22:
 1. In contrast to Israel that failed to trust Scripture and its fulfillment in Jesus' ministry and thus had failed to obtain access to the long-desired Messianic Kingdom, Jesus told His disciples that if they had faith and did not doubt [God and His Word], they could not only achieve what He had done to the fig tree, but they could even address "this mountain," the Mount of Olives between Bethany and Jerusalem (Matthew 21:17-18), "Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea," and it would occur, Matthew 21:21.
 2. Furthermore, Jesus promised that in all matters, whatever they would ask for in prayer [in accord with God's will and Word, of course (1 John 5:14-15)], by believing, they would receive, Matthew 21:22.
 3. Jesus wanted His disciples to succeed where the nation Israel had failed, and success with God comes by believing that He will reward those who believe in Him and heed His Word, cf. Hebrews 11:6.

Lesson: *When Israel abnormally failed to trust God's Word and Jesus' fulfillment of it in His ministry, thus missing the Kingdom, Jesus illustrated this failure by cursing a fig tree for its abnormal failure to produce early ripe figs, and used the tree's rapid death to teach His disciples to succeed in a life of faith versus Israel's failure.*

Application: *(1) May we believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, for eternal life, John 20:31. (2) May we as believers heed Jesus' call to live a life of FAITH in God and His Word for BLESSING in the Christian life!*