

DOCTRINE OF THE FIG TREE

- I. Introduction.
 - A. This doctrine assumes dispensations. *See Doctrine of Dispensations.*
 - B. Dispensations are periods of history in which God appoints certain members of the human race with the responsibility and obligation for the administration of His plan. Cf.Eph.3:8-10
 - C. Dispensationalists generally recognize that the Age of Israel was disrupted by the Church Age on the Day of Pentecost 33AD, and has yet further history to fulfill.
 - D. Israel's history is depicted with this inherent interruption under the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. Dan.9:24-27 *See Doctrine of Daniel's 70 Weeks*
 - E. The 70 weeks are symbolic for 70 7 year increments or 490 years that anticipate the final 490 years of the Age of Israel that ushers in everlasting righteousness. Dan.9:24
 - F. There is a halt of Israel's administration after 69 weeks (483 years) that occurs in correlation with the crucifixion of Christ. Dan.9:26a
 - G. This leaves the remaining one week (7 years a.k.a. Daniel's 70th week) that will be fulfilled in future history in correlation with the rise of Antichrist. Dan.9:26b-27
 - H. The marquee event that completes the administration of the Church and reengages the Age of Israel is the rapture. Rev.3:16 cf. 1The.5:1-10 *See Doctrine of the Rapture*
 - I. The doctrine of the Fig Tree further assumes these realities as will be apparent in teaching by Christ associated with a fig tree.
 - J. There are those dispensationalists that contend the fig tree has no symbolic bearing in this regard.
 - K. This issue of contention revolves around the Doctrine of Imminence.
 - 1. The definition for imminence is simply that with surety, or it is likely that, something will happen without unnecessary delay; it is impending or imminent.
 - 2. There is nothing in the term itself that governs when or not the event will occur. Cp.2Pet.3:8-9
 - 3. The false view holds that the definition of imminence is Jesus could come at any moment in history from the Day of Pentecost forward.
 - a. This view widely accepted is based on a misunderstanding of Jesus' words in Mat.24:36, where He disclaims knowing the time of His return from the perspective of His humanity while under kenosis.
 - b. That one cannot know then influences their emphasis behind Mat.24:42-44 in exhortation that believers are to be ready in every generation following His ascension (since you cannot know).
 - c. They further hold that there is no prophecy fulfilled in the Church Age and therefore no signs or indicators for chronological orientation as to when the rapture might occur and the Age of Israel recommence.
 - 4. Refutations:

- a. Christ told Peter he would get old and die. Joh.21:18-19 *What about Peter's generation?*
 - b. In parabolic teaching, Christ clearly understood an extended absence from earth before His return. Mat.13:24-30 cf.37-43; 25:5,19; Luk.20:9
 - c. Christ understood the destruction of Israel and dispersion of 70 AD. Mat.24:2; Luk.19:41-44; 21:20-24
 - d. This dispersion is further referenced in Hos.6:1-2 to last for a symbolic two days (2000 years).
 - e. It is incongruous to suggest God only punishes Israel for a few years in their rejection of their Messiah and then immediately rewards them with the millennial kingdom.
 - f. The Revelation to the 7 churches demands fulfillment literally not until the 2nd Century and prophetically the spiritual conditions of the Church indicate an end to the Church Age only after the realization of the Philadelphia and Laodicea periods. Rev.2-3
 - g. Other prophecy fulfilled in the Church Age besides the 7 churches and destruction of Israel include the rise of monasticism in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD (1Tim.4:1ff) and uniformitarian evolutionists appearing in the late 19th and 20th centuries (2Pet.3:3ff).
 - h. The true force of Jesus' exhortation in Mat.24:42-44 is that believers not prepared for Christ's return will be caught off-guard spiritually; not that ignorance of the actual day is the catalyst for orientation, but spiritual preparedness at all times is.
5. It should be noted that another parallel contention that goes hand-in-hand with those that hold the false view of imminence is the rejection of the U.S. in prophecy.
 6. Those of this ilk reject that the Fig Tree in its uses in the Bible has any symbolism for national Israel.
 7. The Doctrine of the Fig Tree is imperative for a clear understanding of events that lead up to and into Daniel's 70th Week and the 2nd Advent.
 8. It puts a chronological governor on major prophetic power players appearing in the last days such as the 4 beasts of Dan.7 and the prophetic Babylon's of Rev.17-18.

II. Vocabulary and descriptive characteristics.

A. Hebrew vocabulary: **תְּנַיִף** – t^eenah; f.noun; 39X; a fig tree,

B. Greek vocabulary. **συκῆ** - suke; f.noun; 16X; a fig tree.

C. Definition and description.

1. The fig tree belongs to the family *Moraceae* (which is derived from the Latin name for mulberry), the genus *figus carica*, and is related to the wild fig (*figus sycamorus*).
2. It is part of a large family with highly variable growth habits, but which is quite important to the world in terms of timber, medicine, human and animal food and as ornamental.

- D. The Bible clearly employs three principle horticultural symbols for national Israel:
 - 1. The vine. Psa.80:8-14; Isa.5:1-7
 - 2. The olive tree. Jer.11:16-17; Hos.14:6; Rom.11:17,24
 - 3. The fig tree. Jer.8:13; 24:1-10; Hos.9:10; Joe.1:7
 - E. As such, these analogies serve as a very fine symbol for Israel based on its importance to the economy of God and to the world at large. Rom.11:12
- III.** Further background information in consideration of Israel as the symbolic fig tree.
- A. The Jews clearly lost the second commonwealth in 70 AD, as they did the first commonwealth in 586 BC, due to their negative volition toward doctrine.
 - B. This event happened in fulfillment of the prophecy in Luk.19:43-44; 21:20-24 cp. Dan.9:26.
 - C. From that date until 1948 AD, the Jewish people were not in possession of a national homeland.
 - D. The land promised to Abraham and his descendants forever, languished in an undeveloped state under control of various Gentile powers, fulfilling Deu.29:22-28.
 - E. God promised to restore the Jews to their land if they would repent of the evil that brought His judgment. Deu.30:1-10
 - F. Although the return of the Jews in the last half of the 20th century is in unbelief (a seeming contradiction to point E), Eze.36:22-25 indicates that God is acting to restore them to the land prior to their spiritual conversion.
 - 1. It is clearly taught that the physical restoration will precede the spiritual conversion. Eze.37:1-13, 21-23
 - 2. Each of these passages places the physical restoration to the land before the spiritual cleansing.
 - G. The restoration process is the result of a political process known as Zionism, the founder of which was Theodore Herzl.
 - H. Jewish leaders have in this present century, aggressively and doggedly sought out their fellow Jews among all the nations. Jer.16:14-16.
 - I. In fact, from 1948-2001 the Jerusalem report chart gives the following summary of Jewish immigration.
 - 1. Russia 1,000,000+ 2. Morocco/Algeria 345,753 3. Romania 300,000
 - 4. Poland 171,753 5. Iraq 130,302 6. Iran. 76,000 7. US 71,480
 - 8. Turkey 61,374 9. Yemen 51,158 10. Ethiopia, 48,624 11. Argentina 43,990
 - 12. Bulgaria 42,703 13. Egypt and Sudan 37,548 14. Libya 35,865
 - 15. France 31,172 16. Hungary 30,316 17. India 26,759 18. UK 26,236
 - 18. Czech. 23,984 19. Germany 17,912 20. South Africa 16,277
 - J. This all in spite of the fact that Great Britain had capitulated to Arab demands to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1920's and 1930's, issuing a series of "White Papers" that severely limited immigration or made it illegal.
 - K. However, the Council of State rescinded all the White Paper decrees on May 15, 1948, when the State of Israel was established.

- IV.** During the three years of His public ministry, Christ used the fig tree to teach three separate lessons about national Israel.
- A.** The parable of the barren fig tree. Luk.13:6-9
1. The certain man is God the Father.
 2. The fig tree refers to national Israel.
 3. The vineyard-keeper is Christ.
 4. The lack of fruit or figs teaches the void of Divine good production based on –V in the nation as a whole evidenced by their rejection of Messiah.
 5. The period of three years looks to Christ’s ministry that evidenced their –V.
 6. Christ, intercedes with the Father on behalf of the nation.
 7. The command to cut it down is the administration of the fifth cycle of discipline, the destruction and dispersion of the nation.
 8. The reprieve for the tree demonstrates the period of grace that lasted for the balance of Christ’s public ministry and the early portion of the Church Age.
 9. The process of digging the soil and fertilizing is His attempt to stir up positive volition through an evangelistic period.
 10. The Son is in agreement with the Father, and failure to produce fruit spelled the destruction of the fig tree. Cp.Mat.3:10; 7:19
- B.** The second lesson concerns the cursing of the barren fig tree. Mat.21:18-22
1. This event occurred over 2 days on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings of the last week of the Lord’s first advent. Cp. Mar.11:12-14, 20ff
 2. It demonstrated His concession that the nation would not recover.
 3. This is not a parable, but the record of an actual event, with symbolic and prophetic significance.
 4. Jesus became hungry in His humanity and approached the fig tree, desiring mature figs.
 5. However, He knew in advance that there were no figs on the tree since Passover was not the season for figs. Mar.11:13
 6. Therefore, we must recognize that what Jesus did, he did for the benefit of the disciples to teach a lesson that is still on record.
 7. Again, the fig tree represents national Israel, and the absence of figs represents the lack of +V and Divine good production.
 8. Finding only leaves, Jesus cursed the tree, pronouncing a death sentence that killed it.
 9. The fact that the tree had leaves only is analogous to the nation with people, and their overt institutions, religion, social life, politics, etc. which are characteristic of a nation but do not sustain before God.
 10. The destruction of this tree was a portent of the judgment of God that would fall on the nation in 70 AD.
 11. Mark informs us that the tree withered from the roots up, analogous to the total destruction of the Second Commonwealth that would not allow it to grow back on its own. Mar.11:20-21
 12. Every historical attempt to re-establish Israel consistently met with failure until 1948 when the nation was restored according to God’s timetable.

- 13.** Vss.21-22 further deal with the destruction of the nation and subsequent dispersion of the Jews among the Gentile nations.
- a.** This teaching is not an open invitation for believers to go around attempting to move mountains, nor is it mystical or abstract.
 - b.** It is taught in the direct context of the cursing of the fig tree, and *this mountain* refers to Israel as well.
 - c.** Mountains in prophetic language are analogous to kingdoms, hills referring to smaller or less significant nations. Isa.2:2,14
 - d.** The sea refers to the vast numbers of Gentile humanity into which the Jews were dispersed following the destruction of the nation. Isa.8:6-8; 17:12-13; Jer.47:2; Rev.13:1; 17:1 cf.15
 - e.** The mountain had to be removed due to its hostility against the Lord and those that brought the truth to it.
- C.** The parable of the fig tree being restored is set forth as the final lesson. Mat.24:32; Mar.13:28; Luk.21:29-30
- 1.** This parable was given Thursday following the cursing of the fig tree the day before Christ's crucifixion.
 - 2.** In each account, the parable follows on the contextual heels of events pertaining to the last days. Mat.24:1-31; Mar.13:1-27; Luk.21:5-28
 - 3.** A parable is by definition a story using common objects with which all men are readily familiar to teach a higher spiritual principle.
 - 4.** Christ Himself taught the proper method of interpreting parables when he instructed the disciples about the parable of the soils. Mar.4:13ff
 - a.** Parables are employed by Jesus in order to reveal truth to those that are positive and hide it from those that are negative. Mar.4:10-12
 - b.** Each item in the parable is symbolic and each symbol stands for something literal.
 - c.** The "big idea" of interpreting parables is completely at odds with how Jesus interpreted parables.
 - 5.** Therefore, this is not simply, as some state, a quick lesson to teach the reality that all the events of the discourse will be fulfilled, just as certainly as trees go through a yearly growth cycle. Luk.21:29
 - 6.** Jesus commands the disciples to learn/comprehend/understand the parable of the fig tree.
 - a.** The aorist imperative is employed, the form serving to command the action as a whole. Mat.24:32; Mar.13:28
 - b.** The verb "learn/μανθάνω – manthano" would then have the following force, "learn this so that you know *the parable of the fig tree* and understand what it means in relation to these events I just discussed".
 - c.** Why would Jesus tell them to learn a parable in the context of the teaching about the end times if the parable did not relate to the end times?
 - d.** Simply put, this parable is the answer to the latter twofold questions the disciples earlier posed "*what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*" Mat.24:3

- e. The parable of the fig tree is the sign that points to the greater reality that Christ is soon to return and the world is about to end.
- f. Those that argue that the sign is found in Mat.24:30 do so based simply on the fact that the Greek word “sign/σημειον – semeion” is used in both verses.
 - 1) The disciples really asked two questions, although most interpreters tend to treat it as one question, and Jesus answers them in verses 29-34 in the order that they asked Him.
 - 2) The disciples did not understand that the sign of the end of the age actually preceded the sign of His coming.
 - 3) The sign of His coming is His coming, there is no sign/event /indicator that He is returning at the Second Advent until He actually shows up.
 - 4) Jesus places His return immediately after the tribulation of those days, the final three and one-half years of human history.
 - 5) If that is the sign/event/indicator *of the end of the age*, it comes too late to be of any practical value.
 - 6) In other words, how would knowing that the age was over be a warning that the end of the age was coming?
 - 7) Clearly, this is the answer to the first question, *what is the sign of your coming?*
 - 8) The phrase “*of the Son of Man*” is a genitive of apposition, equating the sign and His person, and could be translated “*the sign is the Son of Man*”.
 - 9) In the direct context of Mat.24:23ff, these verses really only apply to the saints that find themselves in *great tribulation* (vs.21), the final three and one-half years of human history.
 - 10) Therefore, Jesus answers the question of his disciples and provides critical information so the elect are not fooled by some “earthly appearance” of Christ. Mat.24:23-27
 - 11) His answer to the second question *what is the sign of the end of the age?* is found in Mat.24:32-33.
 - 12) While the sign of verse 30 deals with His actual arrival, the sign/parable of vss.32-33 clearly deals with the time prior to His coming. Mat.24:34
 - 13) How are we to know when the coming of Christ is near and the age is about to end?
 - 14) We must learn it from the parable of the fig tree.
- 7. The parable of the fig tree contains the following symbols and each corresponds to an end time reality.
 - a. The *fig tree* represents national Israel.
 - b. *The branch already becoming tender* refers to the replanting of national Israel in 1948, something expressly declared to be the work of the Lord. Isa.60:21

- c. *The putting forth its leaves* refers to the new immigrants returning to Israel via the Zionist movement, a number now in excess of several million.
- d. *The summer being near* refers to expectation of the next season, ushered in by the return of Christ, and is analogous to the Millennium.
- e. Although not mentioned explicitly, obviously the tree puts forth its leaves in springtime, a period that extends from 1948 until the present, which must be in the Church Age.
- f. This is solidified by the plural use of the word “doors” in vs.33 indicating the change of dispensations.
- g. The only question to be answered is “When will summer arrive?”
- 8. Following the parable, which we are commanded to GAP, Jesus instructs those that have gapped the parable to recognize the significance of it.
- 9. While He is answering the question of the disciples, He is in reality speaking to the believers that will be alive to *see all these things*.
- 10. *All these things* refers in context to the immediate things of verse 32, the branch becoming tender and the fig tree putting on leaves.
- 11. By observation, when one can observe national Israel back in the land and can see the signs that mark the *beginning of the birth pangs* proliferating, he can be certain that the end of the age is near. Mat.24:8
- 12. Verse 34 closes with the assurance that the generation that witnessed the replanting of the fig tree would still be on the planet to observe the consummation of these things.
 - a. This is not to be taken to mean that the entire generation born after 1948 will be alive at the Second Advent.
 - b. It does mean that there will be people alive at the time of the end that were born in that generation.
 - c. Since the Word of God fixes the general life span of a man at seventy years, it is not a big stretch to say that we could expect the events of Matthew 24 to be concluded by 2018 AD.
 - d. However, any temptation to set dates must be steadfastly avoided, just as those that set dates must be avoided. Mat.24:36
 - e. We may have sufficient information to determine the particular generation (and we do) but we do not have enough information to be more specific than that.

- V. The prophetic word also provides us further information about other entities and phenomena that would exist alongside the newly replanted nation.
 - A. Russia as a dominant military power. Eze.38:1-4; 39; Dan.7:5
 - B. Persia/Iran. Eze.38:5
 - C. Ethiopia. Eze.38:5
 - D. Put/Libya. Eze.38:5
 - E. Gomer/Germany?. Ezek. 38:6
 - F. Beth-togarmah/Turkey. Ezek. 38:5
 - G. The U.S. Dan.7:4; Jer.50,51; Rev.18
 - H. Great Britain. Dan.7:4

- I. The far-eastern confederacy, the kings of the east. Dan.7:6; Rev.16:12
- J. The Revived Roman (European Union) Empire, consisting of a ten nation confederacy. Dan.7:7; Rev.13:1; Rev.17:3,9-14
- K. European Catholicism. Rev.17
- L. The signs, which are known as birth pains (they begin rather mild and infrequent and grow increasingly more intense and frequent), are listed in Mat.24:4ff and Luk.21:7ff.
 - 1. False prophets and false Christs.
 - 2. Wars (hot) and rumors of wars (cold).
 - 3. Proliferation of earthquakes.

Worldwide earthquake data for 1970-1999

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
4139	4507	4548	5175	4996	5318	6308	5775	6428	7161

1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
7348	6829	7747	9842	10493	13115	12718	11290	12711	14585

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
16612	16516	19548	21476	19371	21007	19938	19872	21668	20832

- 4. Proliferation of famines.
- 5. Wolf callers, those that attempt to set dates. Luk.21:8
- 6. Plagues, like AIDS.
- M. An unprecedented peace movement. IThe.5:1-3

VI. Further apologetics of refutation against objections to the identification that interprets national Israel as the fig tree.

- A. **Objection:** The present return of the Jews to Palestine is in unbelief and therefore, does not count.
- B. **Refutation:** Jesus came to the nation while they were in a state of unbelief and Ezekiel prophesied that God would return them in unbelief. Eze.36:22-25,36; 37:7-14
- C. **Objection:** There are no prophecies that were not fulfilled by Pentecost that are fulfilled in the Church Age.
- D. **Refutation:** The fifth cycle was fulfilled in 70 AD; the rise of the monastic orders occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries AD; the uniformitarian evolutionary scoffers arise in the late 19th and 20th centuries. 1Tim.4:1ff; 2Pet.3:3-6
- E. **Objection:** Jews have always resided in the land.
- F. **Refutation:** The fact that a small community of Jews has been in the land is not the issue of the parable; the issue is the reestablishment of a nation.
- G. **Objection:** God did not establish the current nation.
- H. **Refutation:** God establishes all nations. Dan.2:21; 4:17; Act.17:26
- I. **Objection:** When God establishes Israel, it will be supernatural and the nation will enjoy Millennial prosperity.

- J. Refutation:** This manifests complete ignorance of prophecy and the restoration process, making the last phase apply to the whole. It is evident that the Bible foresaw a gradual restoration process. Isa.43:5-6; Jer.16:14-18; 50:6-8; 51:6,45
- K. Objection:** The fig tree is not used as a symbol for Israel and the identification is wrong.
- L. Refutation:** The term fig or fig tree is clearly used of the nation and its people. Jer.24:1-5; Hos.9:10; Joe.1:7
- M. Objection:** The term *generation* does not mean generation, it actually means race and is referring to Israel as a people.
- N. Refutation:** The Greek term γενεά means generation, the Greek term γένος means kind, race, stock, or family.

VII. Various observations and applications.

- A.** No major event in the plan of God comes and goes unannounced; God does not keep believers in the dark about major events as seen in the life of Noah, Moses, First Advent generation, etc. Amo.3:7; Gen.6:13; 18:17; Joh.15:15
- B.** While the traditional definition of imminence is incorrect, we would state that each generation was to be alert, watching for the signs that would point to the return of Christ. Mat.24:42; 25:13
- C.** The commands of scripture to alertness and application are based on the presupposition that the believer is not unaware of prophetic information. 1The.5:1
- D.** Those that teach sound doctrine are to act as porters, signaling the Master's return. Mar.13:33-37
- E.** This sign, as all signs, points to something greater; just as the rainbow says, "no more flood", the sign of the fig tree says, "last generation before the end". Gen.9:11-17; Mat.24:3 cf.vss.32-34
- F.** Each believer should maximize in terms of intake and application of doctrine, encouraging those that are in your periphery. Heb.10:25 "*as you see the day drawing near*".
- G.** Guard the *esprit de corps*, (that spirit that is to pervade the body of Christ, implying sympathy, enthusiasm, devotion and jealous regard for the honor of the body as a whole) knowing that the last days are a time of intense spiritual turmoil and many will fall by the wayside. Mat.24:12
- H.** Be aware of Satan's various strategies.
 1. Watch for telltale signs of the lukewarm syndrome that permeates our time. Rev.3:14ff
 2. Be aware that one of his favorite tactics is to divide and conquer, and be diligent *to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Eph.4:3
- I.** Be alert to prophetic developments, especially the construction of the third Temple.