

The Eschatology of the Servant Part 4 – Mark 13:28-31 “Who or What is the Fig Tree?”

Please Stand and Open your Bible to Mark 13:28-31

Today we are going to answer the question “Who or what is the fig tree” that Jesus mentions here. Let us review what we have learned so far in Mark’s account of the Olivet Discourse. But first here is our breakdown of our lessons:

The Eschatology of the Servant Mark 13

13:1-13 “Context, Context, Context”

13:14 “Who is the Antichrist?”

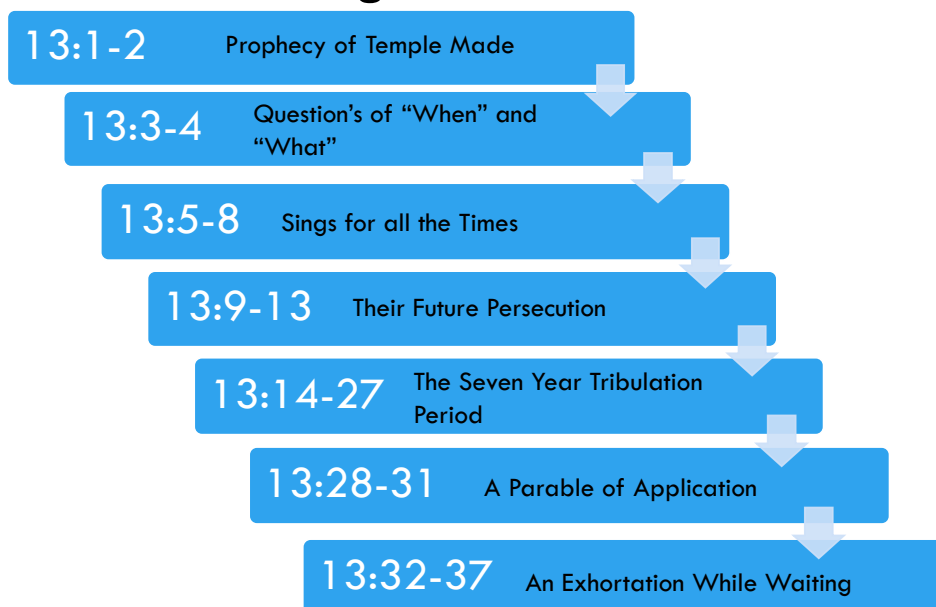
13:15-27 “What is the Tribulation?”

13:28-31 “Who or What is the Fig Tree?”

13:32-36 “The Doctrine of Imminency”

13:37 “The Pretribulation Rapture of the Church”

Here is a running breakdown of where we are:



As we have seen in the past with the way Jesus has taught. He answers their questions by correcting their theology and then give them application. He has finished answering the “When” and the “What” and is now giving them application for them and also for you and me.

Now this parable of the fig tree is one of those scriptures that has caused quite a few disputes in the church. It is also a section that people have written entire books on it. Just one search on Amazon for “Israel Fig Tree” came up with these*...

So much has been devoted to this subject that some have chosen to ignore its importance or to over emphasize it. I have, in my studies, discovered that most of this is drawn out of ignorance of the scriptures and a failure to incorporate a Healthy Robust Biblical Grammatical Historical Hermeneutic. We are a Bible Church and that is what we do so let us start with the differing views.

1. It's allegorical of the time of the end as a generation will see the second coming of Christ
2. The Fig Tree is the Tribulation Period, and the leaves are the Abomination of Desolation, and the generation are those that see it.
3. The Fig Tree is Israel in the tribulation and the generation are those that will go through it until the Second Coming

4. The Fig Tree is Israel, and the leaves budding are its reformation, and the generation are those that will see it. They will not pass away before all these things happen.

And there are many other variations of it that are too many to list, but you get the point. What I will show you today it is not only very important but is easy to understand. Let us go through these four verses and see if Israel is the Fig Tree and is a generation a set period of time...

Mark 13:28

“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.

First, let us remember that a parable should not be used to make doctrine. It can only confirm doctrine that is already made clear in scripture. Also, as we will come back to it in a moment, that where something used in one parable it is used in them all. We have examples from Matthew 13. The seed in the word, the soil is the hearts of man, the birds are the agents of Satan and so on. But what is interesting in this is that Jesus tells us that the parable is not the Fig Tree but comes from the Fig Tree. It is more literally in the original like this...

Now * from the Fig Tree learn this Parable

This is an important point that will make sense in a little bit, but the verse is very simple to understand.

Mark 13:28

“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.

This is something that is very easy for us to understand and even more for those that heard it. Figs in Israel flower first on the old growth in the spring and produces a small amount of fruit that will ripen in June (Early Figs) and then the leaves appear and then more growth and fruit that is ripened later at the end of summer. (Late Figs) So once a fig starts to produce leaves you know that Summer is near. So now to application...

Mark 13:29

So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!

What things? The things He has been talking about. What is that? The leaves of the Fig Tree. What the Fig Tree represents defines the meaning here. If it is the Tribulation than it is the things happening in the seventieth week and the “It” is the second coming of Christ. But if the Fig Tree is the Nation of Israel than “it” is the Tribulation Period. If your translation says “he” it is wrong. The Greek word is a verb that means “It is” This will all make sense in a minute. We are going to see that once the Fig Tree is starting to produce leaves this time that He is talking about is right at the doors.

Mark 13:30

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Now, this is the place that people get all hung up on and make a big deal about in their books. They take whole chapters to describe how long a Generation is. Is it 40 years? 70 years? 100 years? Many prophecy guys back in seventies look at the rebirth of Israel in 1948 and were figuring that Jesus had to return by 1988. Even Chuck Smith said this in his New Years Prophecy Update on December 31, 1987. I don't know if you have ever heard of this book... *88 reasons why the rapture is in 1988. This book was a huge phenomenon then and a best seller. It would have been all over YouTube if it would have been around then. The problem arises when we ignore context and scriptural consistency. Generation here is a noun in the feminine with a definite article before it.

γενεά geneá, ghen-eh-ah'; from (a presumed derivative of) G1085; a generation; by implication, an age (the period or the persons):—age, generation, **nation**, time.

The context will tell us! If the Fig Tree is the Nation of Israel, then this generation is speaking of the nation not a period of time. I think this is obvious as it is in the feminine. It makes sense since nations are often looked at as “her”. If this is true, then “All Things” would refer back to the Day of the Lord or the Seventieth Week of Daniel. And then Jesus ends it like this...

Mark 13:31

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

This incredible statement that He is making is showing us that He is speaking as God the Son speaking in a way only God can speak.

Isaiah 46:10

“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’”

And as another thing to think about is the use of “Heaven and Earth”. God uses this terminology specifically for Israel...

Jeremiah 33:25-26

Thus says the Lord: ‘If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them.’ ”

Isaiah 51:16

And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay

the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.' ”

All throughout scripture God relates His covenant to Heaven and Earth to His covenant with Israel. This gives us a very Jewish context to all of what He has been teaching and so to fully understand this we must know what He meant by the Fig Tree. Is the Fig tree Israel? Now because many teachers hold on to Generation as a period of time, they will reject the Fig Tree is Israel hypothesis. They say it can't be because no man knows the day and hour, so it is just a parable for those during the tribulation. But we must be honest Bible students and go back to how we are to learn parables and ask “Has Jesus told a parable that gives us the definition of the Fig tree? The answer is yes!

Luke 13:6-9

He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 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?’ 8 But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”

This section of Luke is put together more thematically than chronological and deals with the religious leader's rejection of Jesus. In that context we know this is referring to National

Israel not producing fruit for their Messiah. And again, fresh on their minds would be Jesus cursing the Fig Tree...

Mark 11:12-14

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

This of course is the day after his Triumphant Entry when He was presenting Himself to the Nation as their Messiah and cried as he went into the city expecting their coming rejection.

And this led later (That Morning!) to a lesson of faith when they saw that the tree had withered away. This leads us to further ask How can we know that the Fig Tree is Israel? Israel is referred in scripture to three different types of plants.

The Vine – Isaiah 5:1-7 – Spiritual Privileges

The Fig Tree – Jeremiah 24:1-10 – National Privileges

The Olive Tree - Jeremiah 11:16-17 & Romans 11:17-27 – Religious Privileges

We do not have time to go through all three but let us take a moment to look at the Fig Tree. Jeremiah 24 talks about National Israel's sins being equivalent to a basket of bad figs. But other places tell us about this...

Hosea 9:10

I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers
As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went
to Baal Peor, And separated themselves to that shame; They
became an abomination like the thing they loved.

Joel 1:7

He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree; he has
stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made
white.

And Israel when she is at rest is seen as a place of Fig Trees...

1 Kings 4:25

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine
and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of
Solomon.

So to say that the Fig Tree, that Jesus is telling to learn from, is
not Israel is to ignore the clear teaching of scripture and if we
understand that then the context demands that a generation is
speaking about the nation and not a period of time. With that
said this is how we can see this

When you see Israel become a nation again you know that the
Day of the Lord is near and that she will stay a Nation until all
these things come to pass. You can bank on it because I said
it!

But wait a minute pastor you said we cannot make any doctrine from a parable! Can you confirm this?

Ezekiel 36:22-24

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord,” says the Lord God, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.”

We also have all the references to Israel back in the land and operating the sacrifices during the seventieth week showing us that she has to be a nation before that time starts.

So, we can take what Jesus is saying at face value. We are living in a time where Ezekiel’s prophecy has been fulfilled. The Fig Tree is now sprouting leaves. She has yet to bear fruit but will at the end of the seventieth week. That time is at the door!

Before we leave, I want to leave you a very interesting scripture in the Song of Solomon that I believe Jesus is expecting His readers to know. Why? Because it uses the same language He is using here. The Song of Solomon is no doubt a beautiful

picture of Jesus and the Church. But did you know that there are prophetic pictures in it to? There is here!

Song of Solomon 2:13

The fig tree puts forth her green figs, And the vines with the tender grapes Give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away!

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

ARE YOU READY?