

Jesus Curses an Unfruitful Fig Tree
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Text: Mark 11:12-14 (see also Matt. 21:18-19)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Cursing of the Fig Tree

Central Idea of Message: Jesus condemns *promise without fulfillment, profession without practice, and words without action*, thus, this incident illustrates God's severe judgment of hypocrisy committed by those whom he intends to be known by their fruit (cf. Matt. 7:16; Barclay 314-5).

Introduction: Episode 58. After entering Jerusalem the day before, Jesus and his disciples had stayed the night in Bethany and now are found exiting there. Along the way, Jesus spots a tree in the distance. The area was known for figs, so hopes were high that food had been found. But what happens next is not only somewhat strange, but also serves as a portent, and even a prophetic parable, of his impending judgment about to fall on Jerusalem in general and on the temple in particular. Here is Mark's narrative of Jesus cursing a fig tree.

I. The Hunger (v. 12)

- A. Mark appears to be presenting at least some of these episodes in chronological sequence by telling his readers, "And on the next day," probably Monday
- B. It was the day after he had triumphantly entered Jerusalem for the last time, to the grand welcome of many Jews I might add, and went into the temple
- C. Jesus and his band of followers had stayed the night in Bethany and Mark says they had departed from Bethany
- D. Then Mark strangely inserts that Jesus "became hungry"
 1. To state that Jesus became hungry reminds that Jesus was fully human
 2. **The virgin-born Son of God did not escape the gnawing of hunger familiar to all of us**
 3. **Jesus' status as Son of God did not minimize his status of also being fully human**
 4. While it is a fact that Jesus possessed miracle-working power, there is no record of him ever

employing such power to circumvent the natural tendencies common to all humans

5. **The teaching that Jesus Christ is 100 percent divine and 100 percent human does not seem to add up mathematically, but this is the biblical description of the two natures [divine and human] being present in Jesus from fertilization forward**
6. **The doctrine [teaching] regarding the nature of Christ is called *Christology*, and orthodox [right belief] *Christology* dogmatically [emphatically] embraces and promotes the presence of both his divine nature and his human nature**
7. **Any other teaching on the nature of Christ is considered not only unorthodox, but also heresy [terrifyingly false]**

II. **The Fig Tree (v. 13)**

- A. Jesus, being hungry, would naturally be looking for something wholesome to eat [like finding an apple tree, or a pear tree, or a plum tree, or a persimmon tree when out in the country]
- B. Matt. 21:18 uses a word which suggests the time was probably before 6:00 A.M. (cf. Robertson 1:358)
- C. Mark says the tree was at a distance and when Jesus saw it, he went to it to see if there were any figs on it
 1. Jesus knew what a fig tree looked like
 2. He could see it had leaves, which suggested the possibility of fruit
 3. But as he neared the tree he found no fruit
 - a) Mark says it was not the season for figs
 - b) Please note the distinct details Mark gives which stress that what we are reading is non-fiction
 - c) There were leaves growing, but no figs
 - d) Jesus obviously knew that figs were not in season, but since figs precede leaves, the presence of leaves must have gotten his hopes up (cf. Plummer 261; Vincent 1:215)
 4. Barrenness as an illustration
 - a) Barrenness as portrayed in the Old Testament is often associated with the nation of Israel's failure to produce appropriate fruit (cf. Decker 86; Jer. 8:13; Micah 1:7)
 - b) Barrenness can also be associated with God's judgment (Jer. 7:20; Hos. 9:16)

III. The Curse (v. 14)

- A. Mark says that Jesus spoke to the tree
- B. "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!"
 - 1. **This amounts to a curse and is similar to an imprecatory prayer, which is a prayer invoking a curse (see also Acts 8:20, Jude 9)**
 - 2. Jesus did not make a fruitful tree barren, but rather, he pronounced the perpetuity of the barren status the tree was already in
- C. And his disciples were listening, and were, undoubtedly, puzzled why Jesus would curse a tree
- D. "The Lord condemned the tree, not only because of its fruitlessness, but because of its fruitlessness in the midst of a display which promised fruit" (Wuest 1:220)
 - 1. This illustrated hypocrisy
 - 2. Giving the initial impression of being genuine but not living up to the first presentation
 - 3. **In other words, the tree portrayed deceitful professions (cf. Plummer 261), having "promise without performance" (Robertson 1:359)**
 - 4. This is the only recorded miracle of judgment performed by Jesus (cf. Plummer 261)

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) Many present the "leaves" of religious ritual but lack the fruit of authentic spiritual righteousness (v. 13).

(2) "The barren fig tree is a picture of the temple, Jesus' cursing of the tree functions as his pronouncement of judgment on the temple" (v. 14; Decker 86).

(3) Apparently, Jesus expects his followers to bear fruit at all times, both in season and out of season, and uselessness invites judgment (v. 14).

(4) Like trees with leaves but no fruit, many people, including both Christians and so-called Christian, fail to live up to our Lord's reasonable expectations of producing fruit, especially in terms of establishing and abiding by biblical moral and spiritual standards (v. 14).

(5) Jesus condemns *promise without fulfillment, profession without practice, and words without action*, thus, this incident illustrates God's severe judgment of hypocrisy committed by those whom he intends to be known by their fruit (v. 14; cf. Matt. 7:16; Barclay 314-5).