

The Barren Fig Tree

Lesson # 6 (DA 97-108; 580-588; COL 212-218; Mt. 21:18-20; Mk. 11:12-14, 21; Mt. 3:2, 7-12; Revelation 3:14-21)

In this lesson we will study the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree. We are told by the Spirit of Prophecy that this was an “acted parable” (DA 582). In order to understand this parable, it will be necessary to study two other “tree passages”. One is found in Matthew 3:2, 7-12 and the other in Luke 13:1-9. Let’s delve right into our study.

The Message of John the Baptist

1. In Isaiah 61:3 God’s plan for Israel is compared with a fruitful tree: “The they might be called _____ of righteousness, the _____ of the Lord, that He might be _____.”
2. What symbol did John employ to represent the Israel of his day? _____ (Matthew 3:10).
3. Present when John preached were the _____ and the _____. These people felt rich and increased with goods because they were sons of _____ (Mt. 3:7, 9).

Note: John’s message was imparted to a nation which professed great piety and laid claim to the special favor of God. They were like a tree with abundant leaves but no fruit!

4. John rebuked the Jewish nation because they were like trees without _____ (Mt. 3:8)

Note: “Not by its name, but by its fruit, is the value of a tree determined. If the fruit is worthless, the name cannot save the tree from destruction. John declared to the Jews that their standing before God was to be decided by their character and life. Profession was worthless.” (DA 107)

5. John encouraged the Jewish people to _____ and bear fruits which flow from repentance (Mt. 3:8).

Note: John’s call to repentance would have been a great surprise to the Jewish religious leaders. After all, were they not children of Abraham? Were they not keepers of the law? Did they not fast, and pay tithe and keep the Sabbath? What were they to repent of?

6. There were other groups of people present when John preached. The parallel account in Luke (3:10, 12, 14) tells us that the people, the _____ and the _____ asked John what they should do.

Note: John the Baptist told the religious leaders that God could produce children of Abraham from stones. Notice that John was not speaking of literal stones: “As He called Abraham out from a heathen people, so He could call others to His service. Their hearts might now appear as lifeless as the stones of the desert, but His Spirit could quicken them to do His will, and receive the fulfillment of His promise.” (DA 107). The Jews considered the gentiles and the publicans dogs and swine.

7. John told the people to share their _____ and food. He told the publicans to _____ no more than what was appointed to them and he exhorted the soldiers to not use _____ or accuse _____ and to be content with their _____ (Lk. 3:10-14).

Note: All these exhortations given by John had to do with human relations. This is the fruit which God expected the Jewish nation to produce. A description of the fruit is found in Galatians 5.

8. John’s message was one of judgment. He warned that every tree which did not produce fruit would be _____ down and thrown into the _____ (Mt. 3:10). He warned that this judgment process would be executed by the Messiah who would have his _____ in His hand to thoroughly _____ his floor. He would gather the _____ into his barn but would burn the _____ with unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:12).

Note: The chronology of John’s message is important. He began his preaching six months before Jesus began His ministry.

The Parable of Luke 13

4. This parable is addressed to those who felt better than the _____ whom Pilate slaughtered and the eighteen upon whom the tower in _____ fell. (Lk. 13:1-3)
5. The vineyard in this parable represents the _____.
6. The owner of the vineyard symbolizes God the _____. (COL 215, 216)
7. The dresser of the vineyard represents _____, (COL 215, 216)
8. The fig tree represented the “_____ to whom the Saviour had come. . .” (COL 214)

Note: “Israel was a cumberer of the ground. Its very existence was a curse; for it filled the place in the vineyard that a fruitful tree might fill. It robbed the world of the blessings that God designed to give. The Israelites had misrepresented God among the nations. They were not merely useless, but a decided hindrance. To a great degree their religion was

misleading, and wrought ruin instead of salvation.” (COL 215) She adds: “That barren tree, flaunting its pretentious foliage in the very face of Christ, was a symbol of the Jewish nation. The Saviour desired to make plain to His disciples the cause and certainty of Israel’s doom.” (DA 582).

9. The fig tree obviously had leaves. To the outward look it appeared to be healthy. But it was devoid of _____ (Lk. 13:6)

Note: The Jewish nation was high on externals. They tithed, “kept” the Sabbath, fasted, practiced health reform, etc., but their lives were devoid of practical godliness. We might say that they appeared fine outside but they were rotten inside. This is seen in Matthew 23:23-28. Ellen White remarks: “The Jewish religion, with its magnificent temple, its sacred altars, its mitered priests and impressive ceremonies, was indeed fair in outward appearance, but humility, love and benevolence were lacking.” (DA 583)

10. Jesus called upon that generation to _____ or they would perish (Lk. 13:1-3).
11. Most scholars agree that this parable was told by Jesus two and a half years into His ministry. This would mean that three years had passed since John had begun to preach. This would explain why the owner of the vineyard came looking for fruit for a period of _____ years and found none (Lk. 13:7).
12. The dresser of the vineyard begged the owner to allow the fig tree to remain for yet another _____ (Lk. 13:8).

Note: During the last year of His ministry Jesus dedicated special attention to the Jewish nation in the hopes that they would repent and bear fruit.

13. The parable of Luke 13:1-9 ends in suspense: “. . . if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt _____ it _____. (Lk. 13:9). Why don’t we know at this point whether the tree bore fruit or not?

Note: “Jesus did not in the parable tell the result of the gardener's work. At that point His story was cut short. Its conclusion rested with the generation that heard His words. To them the solemn warning was given. "If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Upon them it depended whether the irrevocable words should be spoken. The day of wrath was near. In the calamities that had already befallen Israel, the owner of the vineyard was mercifully forewarning them of the destruction of the unfruitful tree.” (COL 216)

The Fig Tree Withers

1. On the Tuesday before His death, Jesus saw in the distance a fig tree with _____ but when He arrived it had no _____ (Mt. 21:19).

Note: The fig tree first produces fruit and then leaves come out announcing that the tree has fruit. In other words, if the fig tree had leaves it should have had fruit as well! Ellen White remarks: “. . . “one tree appeared to be in advance of all the others. It was already covered with leaves. It is the nature of the fig tree that before the leaves open, the growing fruit appears. Therefore this tree in full leaf gave promise of well-developed fruit.” But she adds that the tree “was a mass of pretentious foliage, nothing more.” (DA 582)

2. There were other fig trees in the orchard that day but they had no _____. These trees represented the _____ (DA 583)

Note: “All the trees in the fig orchard were destitute of fruit; but the leafless trees raised no expectation, and caused not disappointment. By these trees the Gentiles were represented. They were as destitute as were the Jews of godliness; but they had not professed to serve God. They made no boastful pretensions to goodness. They were blind to the works and ways of God. With them the time of figs was not yet.” (DA 583)

3. Jesus cursed the fig tree with the following words: “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for _____ (Mt. 21:19).
4. The next day when Jesus and the disciples passed by the place where the fig tree had stood, it had dried up by its _____ and had _____ away. (Mt. 21:20; Mk. 11:20)

Note: If the fig tree represents the Jewish nation and the tree dried up by its roots and withered away, then God’s plan for the Jewish nation is finished. Then the reestablishment of the Jewish nation in 1948 has not prophetic significance whatsoever!! Ellen White solemnly warns: “The heart that does not respond to divine agencies becomes hardened until it is no longer susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit.” (COL 218)

5. This warning given to the Jewish nation not only applies to them: “The warning sounds down along the line to us in this _____.” (COL 216) “The warning is for all _____. Christ’s act in cursing the tree which His own power had created stands as a warning to all _____ and to all _____.” (DA 586)

Note: It is highly suggested that each prayer meeting participant carefully review the Christ’s message to the Laodicean church in preparation of this lesson because Laodicea is repeating the history of ancient Israel. More on this in class!!

6. What is represented by the hunger of Jesus? “He had come to _____ hungering to find in them the _____ of righteousness. He had lavished on them His gifts, that they might bear fruit for the _____ of the world.” (DA 583-584)

7. Why did the Jewish nation bring ruin upon itself? “They brought ruin upon themselves by refusing to _____ to others. The treasures of truth which God had committed to them, they did not give to the _____.” (DA 586)