

Introduction:

1. So, here is Jesus walking along a road with His disciples. He is travelling from the village of Bethany to the city of Jerusalem, only about two miles. Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree in the distance. As he approaches it, He sees leaves, but no figs. Jesus cursed the tree and it died.
 - a. Why did He do that? This seems to be completely out of character for Jesus. Is He mad at the tree because it didn't have the fruit He wanted? Was this an impulsive moment of anger?
 - b. Consider also, that the text says "it was not the season for figs." If it wasn't the season for figs, then how could Jesus have expected to get any fruit from it? We will learn that Jesus had every right to expect to find something to eat on that tree. There should have been fruit on it!
 - c. This unusual story has caused critics of Jesus to ridicule Him and accuse Him of having a temper tantrum—and therefore He cannot be the perfect Son of God that He claims to be.
2. So, how do we answer? Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?
 - a. In order to answer, we need to know the context in which this happened—our study will find us in Mark 11. But we also need to know something about fig trees.
 - b. After we learn about fig trees, are there any lessons from this story that would apply to us?

The Lesson:**I. The dramatic setting of the fig tree.**

- A. At first, all we see is Jesus walking down a road from one town to another. But there is much more to the scene than this.
 1. The time.
 - a. It is only four days till His death. It is Monday of Passover week. Jesus will die Friday.
 - b. Passover in that year (30 AD) came in early April. The day before the fig tree incident was Sunday—the day that Jesus made His entrance into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11).
 2. The conflict.
 - a. There is a clash coming between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
 - b. It is a storm that has been brewing for more than two years. On numerous occasions, Jesus rebuked the leaders in Jerusalem for their hypocrisy and disobedience to God (Mark 7:6-7, etc.). The Pharisees and Sadducees hated Jesus because of the things He spoke. They knew what He said was the truth, but their hearts were hard!
 3. The wicked plot.
 - a. The Pharisees and Sadducees have been plotting how they might kill Him. The plot will soon come to fruition as Jesus provokes the leaders (Mark 12:12). He does things that anger them. Their answer is to kill Him.
 - b. After a chapter of questions and conflict (Mark 12), Jesus then speaks of the end of the city of Jerusalem (Mark 13:2). The Jewish nation is coming to an end. God's judgment will be poured out on this stubborn, fruitless and disobedient people.
 - c. The conspiracy to murder Jesus moves toward its final stage as Judas makes his agreement with the chief priests to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10-11).
 4. The layout of the text in the fig tree story.
 - a. Mark tells the story in two parts, Mark 11:12-14, 20-22. Why does He do that?
 - b. Sandwiched between the two parts is the story of Jesus clearing the temple, Mark 11:15-18. This is one of those things that provoked the Jewish leaders in their plot to kill Jesus. This is part of the conflict we just spoke of. What the Jews were doing in the temple is one of the reasons why God brought judgment upon them and upon the city of Jerusalem. There was no spirituality in these men. They had no heart for God. But someone might say, "These were religious men, men who spent all their days in the house of God." While that is true, it was only an outward appearance—a show of spirituality. They promised much, but had nothing in their hearts for God.
- B. See the big picture in the book of Mark.
 1. The time—four days till Jesus' death; the conflict—Jesus calls the Jewish leaders to account for their corruption; the plot—a conspiracy by the leaders to kill Jesus. And then the lay of the text—the story of the fig tree wrapped around the clearing of the temple.
 2. It is in this dramatic setting that we find the remarkable act of Jesus cursing the fig tree.

II. Understanding the fig tree.

- A. Hold the drama for a moment as we discuss the lowly fig tree. The answer to this story is not as difficult as it first appears. A simple *Google search of fig trees will teach us something that every fig farmer knows: The common fig tree bears two kinds of fruit each year.
1. The first fruit is called breba. It is an edible fruit, but is inferior to the crop harvested later in the year. In most cultures the breba is ignored. It may be eaten only by the poor, or even fed to animals. It is a tough fruit with a nut-like taste; that does not have the sweet taste of the standard fig. It grows only on last year's shoot growth and appears in March and April at the time when the fig tree puts out its leaves. This time is not the season of figs.
 2. By contrast, the standard fig grows only on the current year's shoot growth. While the breba's quality and quantity are very poor, the standard fig that comes on in the season of figs is rich in both quality and quantity. It is sweet, juicy, luscious and tender—very different from the breba. The standard fig does not ripen for at least six to eight weeks (and up to five months) after the breba. It is significant to note that the breba is a forerunner to the standard fig. If there is no breba, then the tree has become fruitless and will bear no figs.
- B. It is my understanding that when Jesus came to the fig tree in early April, and seeing that it was leaved out, He had every right to expect to find something on the tree, Mark 11:13.
1. This account makes no sense unless it could be expected to find something on the tree. Since the leaves were there, the brebas should have been there. When the text says "it was not the season for figs," it is not telling us that Jesus expected to find figs out of season—but that He did not expect to find figs. He would, however, might expect to find something on it. Since the tree had leaved out, brebas should have been present. They were not. This was a fruitless tree.
 2. Why did Jesus destroy the tree? It is my understanding that Mark places this story in the text the way He does as a symbol of what is to happen to the nation of Israel and particularly the city of Jerusalem and its corrupt leaders. Recall what we said about the layout of the story. It is combined with the account of Jesus clearing the corrupt leaders from the temple. Judgment was coming on such hypocrisy, corruption and fruitlessness.
 3. Though Luke does not tell the story of the cursed fig tree, he does help us with our understanding by the parable in Luke 13:6-9. Jesus speaks this parable in a context that is talking about judgment on Jerusalem, Luke 13:4-5.
 4. In both Mark and Luke the fruitless fig trees represent judgment on Jerusalem.

III. A lesson from the fig tree.

- A. We could point to lessons for apostles about the power of miracles and what could be accomplished by miraculous faith. But there is something more significant.
- B. We could point to lessons the Jewish leaders should have learned from Jesus. Corrupt religion brings the judgment of God. But there is something for us.
- C. The lesson for us is that God expects those who profess to follow Him to bear fruit. Appearance is not enough. An outward show is not enough. The Jews in the temple had the outward appearance, just as did the fig tree! But it was all appearance and no fruit.
1. Jesus expects us to bear fruit, John 15:1-8. We were made to bear fruit. It is not an option.
 2. Our relationship with the Lord Jesus is meant to be life-changing and fruit-bearing, Galatians 5:22-24. People who belong to Christ bear this kind of fruit!
 3. The theme of fruit-bearing is found all over the New Testament, Matthew 7:17-19; Mark 4:20; Romans 6:22; 7:4; Hebrews 13:15. Are we bearing fruit for God?

Conclusion:

1. The lesson from the fig tree isn't a lesson about trees. It is about the fruitless Jewish nation. God destroyed that nation because all they had was an outward appearance of righteousness.
2. The lesson for us is that we must have more than appearance. Anyone can look good on Sunday morning, but that alone is not a good test of right living. God pulls back the leaf and looks for fruit.

*The following websites were used to collect the information about fig trees:

<http://www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/fig.html> (Website of California Rare Fruit Growers, Inc.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_fig (A well-written article about the common fig.)

<http://www.toseftaonline.org> (A Jewish website in Israel that discusses the fig and tithing.)

http://www.rationalchristianity.net/fig_tree.html (An excellent article by F.F. Bruce on the taqsh [breba] fruit.)