

APPENDIX 1

FIGS AND FIG TREES IN THE BIBLE

The following are all of the instances where the words “fig” and “fig tree” are found in the Bible. It will become clear that the fig tree is NEVER is used as a symbol of the nation of Israel.

ADAM AND EVE IN EDEN SEWED FIG LEAVES TOGETHER (GENESIS 3:7)

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves (Genesis 3:7 NRSV UE).

Interestingly, we find fig trees in Eden.

THE PROMISED LAND WILL PRODUCE FIGS (DEUTERONOMY 8:7-8)

As Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, they received the following promises:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills; a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey (Deuteronomy 8:7-8 CSB).

Among the blessings of the land will be figs.

JOTHAM’S FABLE (JUDGES 9)

Jotham, the youngest son of the Judge Gideon, said the following to the elders of Shechem:

The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ ... (Judges 9:7-12 ESV).

It is clear that the fig tree, in this context, is not equated with the nation of Israel.

ISRAEL’S PROSPERITY UNDER SOLOMON (1 KINGS 4:25)

Throughout Solomon’s reign, Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan to Beer-sheba, each person under his own vine and his own fig tree (1 Kings 4:25 CSB).

The fig tree, along with the vine, are examples of safety and prosperity in the land of Israel under the rule of Solomon.

ABIGAIL LOADING FIG CAKES (1 SAMUEL 25:18)

Abigail hurried, taking two hundred loaves of bread, two clay jars of wine, five butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys (1 Samuel 25:18 CSB).

Fig cakes are mentioned here with other foods taken by Abigail.

DAVID'S MEN GIVE AN EGYPTIAN FIGS TO EAT (1 SAMUEL 30:11-12)

David's men found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and water to drink. Then they gave him some pressed figs and two clusters of raisins. After he ate he revived, for he hadn't eaten food or drunk water for three days and three nights (1 Samuel 30:11-12 CSB).

This is an illustration of the kindness of David's men.

THE KING OF ASSYRIA PROMISED PROSPERITY TO ISRAEL (2 KINGS 18:31-32)

Don't listen to Hezekiah, for this is what the king of Assyria says: 'Make peace with me and surrender to me. Then each of you may eat from his own vine and his own fig tree, and each may drink water from his own cistern until I come and take you away to a land like your own land — a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey — so that you may live and not die. But don't listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will rescue us" (2 Kings 18:31-32 CSB).

This promise of the prosperity of the fig tree is from the lying words of the king of Assyria.

THE RECOVERY OF HEZEKIAH (2 KINGS 20:7) (ISAIAH 38:21-22)

The Bible records that a lump of pressed figs were used in the healing of King Hezekiah:

Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of pressed figs." So they brought it and applied it to his infected skin, and he recovered (2 Kings 20:7 CSB).

Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a lump of pressed figs and apply it to his infected skin, so that he may recover." And Hezekiah had asked, "What is the sign that I will go up to the LORD's temple? (Isaiah 38:21-22 CSB).

FIG CAKES BRING JOY IN ISRAEL (1 CHRONICLES 12:40)

In addition, their neighbors from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali came and brought food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen — abundant provisions of flour, fig cakes, raisins, wine and oil, herds, and flocks. Indeed, there was joy in Israel (1 Chronicles 12:40 CSB).

On this occasion, fig cakes were part of the provisions that would bring joy to Israel.

A PROVERB ABOUT A FIG TREE (PROVERBS 27:18)

Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and whoever looks after his master will be honored (Proverbs 27:18 CSB).

This is a simple truism, the one who tends the fig tree eats its fruit.

THE RESPONSE OF THE LOVER (SONG OF SOLOMON 2:10-13)

In response my lover said to me: "Get yourself up, my darling, my pretty one, and come, come! For behold, the winter has past, the rain is over, it has gone. Blossoms appear in the land, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its early figs. The blossoming vines give off their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling, my pretty one, and come, come!" (Song of Solomon 2:10-13 TLV).

This is another illustration of the fig tree as a symbol of prosperity.

THE WOE PRONOUNCED UPON SAMARIA (ISAIAH 28:1-4)

It sits at the head of a fertile valley, but its glorious beauty will fade like a flower. Whoever sees it will snatch it up, as an early fig is quickly picked and eaten (Isaiah 28:4 NLT).

In this illustration, Samaria will be eaten like an early fig. There is no mention of a fig tree.

THE NATIONS THAT THE LORD JUDGES ARE COMPARED TO FRUIT ON A WITHERING FIG TREE (ISAIAH 34:1-4)

Draw near, O nations, to hear; O peoples, give heed! Let the earth hear and all that fills it, the world and all that comes from it. For the LORD is enraged against all the nations and furious against all their hordes; he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine or fruit withering on a fig tree (Isaiah 34:1-4 NRSV UE).

The judgment of the Lord against the nations is compared to fruit withering on a fig tree. Notice the comparison of the fig tree is to the heathen nations, not Israel.

THE LORD PREDICTS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LAND (JEREMIAH 5:17)

They [the Babylonians] will consume your harvest and your food. They will consume your sons and your daughters. They will consume your flocks and your herds. They will consume your vines and your fig trees. With the sword they will destroy your fortified cities in which you trust (Jeremiah 5:17 CSB).

Everything in the land of Judah, including the fig trees, will be totally consumed by the invading Babylonians.

THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH ARE COMPARED TO GOOD AND BAD FIGS (JEREMIAH 24)

After King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had deported Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen and metalsmiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD. One basket contained very good figs, like early figs, but the other basket contained very bad figs, so bad they were inedible. The LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "Figs! The good figs are very good, but the bad figs are extremely bad, so bad they are inedible" (Jeremiah 24:1-3 CSB).

In this context, the people of the southern kingdom of Judah are compared to good and bad figs. The exiles in Babylon are compared to good figs, while King Zedekiah, and his officials who had remained in Jerusalem, are compared to bad figs. Nothing whatsoever is said about the fig tree.

THE LORD WILL JUDGE THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (HOSEA 2:12)

I will devastate her vines and fig trees. She thinks that these are her wages that her lovers have given her. I will turn them into a thicket, and the wild animals will eat them (Hosea 2:12 CSB).

Vines and fig trees, symbols of prosperity, will be devastated by the Lord when He brings judgment upon the rebellious people.

THE COMPARISON OF ISRAEL TO FIGS BEFORE THEY REBELLED IN THE WILDERNESS (HOSEA 9:10)

I discovered Israel like grapes in the wilderness. I saw your ancestors like the first fruit of the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal-peor, consecrated themselves to shame, and became abhorrent, like the thing they loved (Hosea 9:10 CSB).

The Lord compares the behavior of the people who exited the Promised Land with their later rebellion. He uses the illustration of the taste of grapes and as well as the taste of the first fruit from a fig tree before they committed shameful behavior.

Notice He is comparing them to the wonderful taste of grapes and figs, NOT to the fig tree itself. Fig trees and vines do not grow in the wilderness, they must be planted.

THE LORD PROMISES THE RESTORATION OF THE LAND (JOEL 2:21)

Don't be afraid, land; rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done astonishing things. Don't be afraid, wild animals, for the wilderness pastures have turned green, the trees bear their fruit, and the fig tree and grapevine yield their riches (Joel 2:21-22 CSB).

Again the fig trees, as well as the vines, are speaking of the future prosperity of the land, not the land itself.

THE LORD PROMISES PROSPERITY (MICAH 4:4)

He will settle disputes among many peoples and provide arbitration for strong nations that are far away. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war. But each person will sit under his grapevine and under his fig tree with no one to frighten him. For the mouth of the LORD of Armies has spoken (Micah 4:4 CSB).

The fig tree is again used to indicate prosperity and safety.

NO EARLY FIGS ARE FOUND AFTER THE HARVEST (MICAH 7:1)

How sad for me! For I am like one who —when the summer fruit has been gathered after the gleaning of the grape harvest — finds no grape cluster to eat, no early fig, which I crave (Micah 7:1 CSB).

This is another example of the taste of figs used to indicate prosperity. In this case it is the lack of prosperity.

THE PROMISED LAND IS BARREN (HABAKKUK 3:16-18)

I heard, and I trembled within; my lips quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered my bones; I trembled where I stood. Now I must quietly wait for the day of distress to come against the people invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, yet I will celebrate in the LORD (Habakkuk 3:16-18 CSB).

A day of reckoning is coming where there will be no fruit on the vines and no budding of the fig trees. In this instance it warns of the distress the land will suffer.

THE PROMISE OF FUTURE BLESSING (HAGGAI 2:18,19)

From this day on, think carefully; from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid; think carefully. Is there still seed left in the granary? The vine, the fig, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yet produced. But from this day on I will bless you" (Haggai 2:18-19 CSB).

While the land was barren, there will come a time of prosperity where the vine, fig tree, etc. will produce. Again, there is no equivalence of the fig tree itself with the nation of Israel.

THE PROMISE OF PROSPERITY (ZECHARIAH 3:10)

On that day, each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree." This is the declaration of the LORD of Armies (Zechariah 3:10 CSB).

Again we find the vine and the fig tree as illustrations of prosperity.

CONCLUSION ON THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORDS FIG AND FIG TREE

After examining each passage of the Old Testament in context, we find there is nothing whatsoever that equates the fig tree with the nation of Israel. The references to the fig tree speak of the prosperity and safety, or lack thereof, of the people living in the land. The fig tree is never used as a symbol of the nation itself.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

As was true with the Old Testament, we do not find the fig tree representing the nation of Israel in the New Testament.

JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 21:18-22) (MARK 11:12-14; 20-25)

In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive (Matthew 21:18-22 NRSV UE).

The next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if He would find any fruit on it. When He came up to it, He found nothing except leaves, because it wasn't the season for figs. And He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening. ... As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:12-14; 20-25 ESV).

Both Matthew and Mark record the episode of Jesus cursing the fig tree that had no fruit. We should make note of the fact that when the disciples, specifically Peter, questioned the Lord about it, He said nothing about

it being symbolic of Israel. Instead, when confronted with the cursed fig tree, He brought up the subject of faith and prayer.

If there was ever an opportunity to explain to His disciples that the fig tree was to be equated with the nation of Israel, this was it. But He did not.

More likely, the curse against this fig tree symbolized the Temple. We should not miss the fact that Mark has this account sandwiched between two episodes of Jesus going to the Temple. It was the Temple in Jerusalem that would be cursed since it had become a den of robbers, thieves, instead of the house of prayer it was meant to be. Shortly after the cursing of the fig tree, the Lord would predict the Temple's destruction:

See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Matthew 23:37-38; 24:1-2 NRSV UE).

Furthermore, Jesus said that the cursed fig tree would never bear fruit again. This could NOT refer to the nation of Israel. Indeed, as we just read, Jesus said He would come again to them once they received Him as their Messiah. We also read of this prediction in Zechariah:

Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died (Zechariah 12:10 NLT).

This will occur at the time when they would see Him again, at His Second Coming.

JESUS GIVES THE PARABLE OF A BARREN FIG TREE (LUKE 13:6-7)

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down (Luke 13:6-7 ESV).

There is nothing in this context that equates the fig tree with Israel. In fact, the fig tree is planted in the midst of a vineyard, which the Lord Himself used as a symbol for the nation of Israel!

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting... (Isaiah 5:7 ESV).

It is a vineyard that is equated with Israel, never a fig tree!

Therefore, since a distinction is made between the fig tree that is planted in the vineyard, and the vineyard itself, we certainly should not equate the two.

Again, the only illustration in the Bible of Israel from something planted is the vineyard, not the fig tree!

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 24:32-34) (MARK 13:28-31) (LUKE 21:29-33)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:32-34 ESV)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:28-31 ESV)

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Luke 21:29-33 ESV).

Each of the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the parable of the fig tree. None of them equate the fig tree with the nation of Israel. Neither should we assume that Jesus’ disciples would have immediately connected the two.

JESUS SEE NATHANIEL UNDER THE FIG TREE (JOHN 1:48-50)

Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” (John 1:48-50 ESV).

On this occasion, the fig tree was where Nathaniel was sitting under when his brother Philip called him to meet Jesus. It is not used symbolically for Israel.

JAMES MAKES A WELL-KNOWN COMPARISON (JAMES 3:12)

Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water (James 3:12 ESV)

James is asking a rhetorical question to which the answer is a clear, “No!”

THE STARS OF HEAVEN DROP LIKE UNRIPE FIGS (REVELATION 6:13)

The stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind (Revelation 6:13 CSB).

In the future, the stars that will fall from the sky are compared to unripe figs.

CONCLUSION ON THE NEW TESTAMENT’S USE OF THE FIG TREE

As we mentioned in Mistakes 16-18, all sixteen uses of term fig tree in the New Testament are literal. In other words, it is always referring to an actual fig tree. This has become apparent as we examined each of the references.

Again, as with the Old Testament, we never find the fig tree equated with the nation of Israel.

In sum, after looking at the totality of Scripture, and examining every reference to figs and the fig tree, we find there is no basis whatsoever of seeing it as a symbolic reference to the nation of Israel.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

Therefore, when we seek to discover the meaning of the parable of the fig tree, found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, one thing that we can conclude is that the fig tree was given as an illustration from nature.

Indeed, it was not meant to be equated with the nation of Israel or the return of the people to their ancient homeland in the last days.

The disciples of Jesus would never have understood it in that manner and neither should we.