

## A LESSON FROM THE FIG TREE

In Matthew 24 after addressing events related to the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel (The 7-year Tribulation Period) which will culminate in the Second Coming, Christ then makes application with this very simple parable.

### **Matthew 24:32 (NKJV)**

**32** “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.

When people spiritualize it – it gets confusing in a hurry. And many have done that with this parable instead of making the simple analogy that Christ intended.

Many have tried to make the fig tree symbolic for Israel in this parable saying that since Israel is back in the land it means the end is near. It is true that some contexts use the fig tree as symbolic for Israel (cf. Jer. 24; Joel 1:6-7; Lk. 13:6; Matt. 21:19). And I agree that some texts like Ezekiel 38 show that Israel being back in the land is indicative of the stage being set for the last day’s finale (Ezek. 38:8, 16). However, I think making that point from this text is forcing it.

In the immediate context Jesus is using the illustration of the fig tree in a very natural sense illustrating “how quickly all these final events will come to pass once they have begun.” (Tim LaHaye)

Fig trees in Israel normally bring forth new leaves in late spring. When this happens, it is a clear SIGN that summer is near. No need to spiritualize it. The straightforward common sense of it is clear.

And then Jesus makes this application...

### **Matthew 24:33 (NKJV)**

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

Note the language here very carefully. When you “**see all these things**”. What things? Well, all the things mentioned in the previous verses as seen in Matthew 24:9-28 working in concert. These things all go together and relate to the tribulation period of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel.

vv. 9-10 Christ's people killed & hated by all nations  
v. 11 many false prophets deceive many  
v. 12 lawlessness abounds – love grows cold  
v. 14 gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world  
v. 15 **see Daniel's abomination of desolation**  
v. 21 great unparalleled Tribulation  
v. 22 so severe that if not shortened no flesh would be saved  
vv. 23-26 false christs and false prophets powerfully deceptive

Note Christ says when they see ALL these things – then KNOW that it is near – at the doors! “All these things” refers to the events of the tribulation period that precede the Second Coming and not to the Second Coming itself.

Let me ask you: Does seeing the abomination of desolation in the temple at exactly the midpoint of the 7-year covenant with Israel accompanied by unparalleled tribulation – does that fit the description of a thief coming in the night? Absolutely NOT! This will be obvious! Christ says at this point they will see the end coming. They will be able to know it is near – even at the doors!

This is clearly talking about the SIGNS of the tribulation period which will usher in the Second Coming of Christ to the earth.

“Jesus commands the disciples to ‘know’ from these signs the nearness of His return. This is possible only if His second coming is predictable.” – **John Hart**

This last phase of Christ's coming will be very predictable in the tribulation period but not before. The first phase (which Christ will deal with next in the chapter) will not be predictable at all but rather will come as a surprise – as a thief in the night.

The second half of the Tribulation Period will unfold with very obvious indicators.

“When its branch...puts forth leaves, you know...near.” (v. 32)

“When you see all these things, know that it is near” (v. 33)

The disciples asked, “what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Mt. 24:3). The answer in effect is that the sign of the end of the age is “all these things” happening in the Tribulation Period. In short, the sign of the end of the age is the events of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. And the specific sign of Christ’s coming will be when He appears in heaven coming in power and great glory as the lightning flashes from the east to the west.

There are no definitive signs for the Rapture – the first phase of Christ’s second coming. There are trends of apostasy. John says we know it is the last hour because of the many antichrists on the scene setting the stage for the ultimate Antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18). Thus, we do see “the Day approaching” but we have no definitive signposts (Heb. 10:25).

In contrast, once people find themselves in the Tribulation Period there will be very definitive signs such as Antichrist signing a 7-year covenant with Israel; Antichrist breaking the covenant halfway through; unparalleled tribulation, etc. When those living see “all these things” they will know the end is “near – at the doors!”

Today, in the Church Age we are told to “live ready” because Christ could come at any time. We don’t know when the Rapture will happen (Perhaps Today!). It is ever imminent. And since we don’t know when the Rapture will happen we don’t know when the Day of the Lord will come – so we in the Church Age have no idea on WHEN either the first phase or the second phase of Christ’s second coming will take place.

All we know is that we are getting closer (Rom. 13:11-14). We see the Day approaching generally in that we see Israel back in the land; we see the nations getting into position for the last day’s finale; we see growing apostasy and the spirit of Antichrist growing rampant – but we don’t know specifically how long until the Rapture will take place. We are not setting any dates! We are called to live ready – all the time. And this has been the calling of the Church down through the entire Church Age.

“Live Ready!”