

Puzzling Parables

The Fruitless Fig Tree

January 7, 2018

Welcome to where we're learning how to produce the fruit of faith!



Happy New Year ... *especially to the fruit trees in Israel.*

[YouTube video: On Tu b'Shevat Morah Leah]

Who knew **the Jews celebrate the birthdays of their trees?** It was necessary; and, it's based on Leviticus 19:23-25.

When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. **Three years it shall be as uncircumcised** to you. It shall not be eaten. But **in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord.** – Leviticus 19:23-24 NKJ

In the fourth year, the fruit is *circumcised/set-apart*, brought into the Temple (the house of God), and offered as firstfruits. Now, **you can't track the birthday of every tree, so they share the Tu (15th) of Shevat.**¹ It's coming up January 30th, at sunset.



A little over a year before the cross, Jesus just sent the 72 to 36 towns in Galilee that He's about to visit before He regroups in Jerusalem, two months from now, just before Passover, **which puts us at the 3rd Tu b'Shevat of His 3.5 year ministry**, as He gears up for the big push toward the fourth Tu b'Shevat.



He's prepared the Twelve to go into Judea. Then, He challenged the indecisive, uncommitted, crowd to judge rightly. Then, news comes about Galilean rebels killed by Romans in the Temple. Jesus asks if the crowd thinks these men, or those killed in the Siloam tower collapse, were guiltier of sin; and, twice says:

I tell you, no! But unless you **repent**, you too will all **perish.** [But sadly, many don't; and, they do] Then [to help them see there's a deadline] he told this parable: – Luke 13:5 NIV

The Barren Fig Tree is all about repenting before we perish. Watch for the references to the third and fourth Tu b'Shevats. [Transcript from "The Barren Fig Tree" video:] "Have you ever bought a fruit tree that didn't produce? You took it home and planted it and cared for it, and then waited ... but when spring came, all you got were *leaves!* It didn't produce the produce! In the parable of 'The Barren Fig Tree', Jesus compels us to ask ourselves the question: What is my life producing?"

¹ If a tree is planted on Shevat 14, it turns *one* the next day; if it's planted on the 16th, it turns *one* 364 days later.



Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” - Luke 13:6-9 NIV

There’s a season of grace to produce the fruit of faith. And, **faith begins with repentance**. And, **faith is maintained with repentance**. Here, quickly, are the six R’s of repentance:

1. **Recognition of sin** *no longer hiding or denying it*
2. **Remorse for sin** *realizing how it hurts God and me*
3. **Returning to Him** *reestablishing that relationship*
4. **Re-surrendering** *giving up all the controls to Him*
5. **Receiving grace** *allowing His holiness to cover me*
6. **Re-devoting myself** *to live for Him, point forward*

The fruit of repentance basically means that **I grow up and stop trusting the promises of sin over the promises of God**. Did you notice that the fig tree was planted in a vineyard?

The **vineyard** of the Lord Almighty is the **house of Israel**, and the **men of Judah** are the **garden** of his delight. – Isaiah 5:7a NIV



And, in Jeremiah (24:1-7) the Lord says that **those who return to Him with all their heart are planted as good figs**. Fig trees and grapevines are coupled together in the OT in prophecies about **God’s people being established and settled and enjoying shade and rest, and producing sweet, pleasing, fruit**.



Every man will sit under **his own vine** [That’s Jesus; He’s the Vine] and under **his own fig tree** [That’s our heart] ... – Micah 4:4 NIV

[Speaking of adulterous Israel, the Lord warns] I will **ruin** her vines and her fig trees ... I will make them a **thicket** ... – Hosea 2:12 NIV



Jesus has already accused the Pharisees of being a thicket of thorns instead of grape-bearing vines or fig-bearing trees.



Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. [Those bear thorns and spikes!] The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. **For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks**. – Luke 6:43-45 NIV

You see, **our heart is a tree in God's vineyard**. And, **our mouth shares what our heart bears**. That's why Scripture uses this weird but *memorable* symbol of circumcision for both fruit trees and our heart. (Deut 10:16; Jer 9:26)



How long does it take a child to speak? About three years.

The fourth year becomes a joy because you can finally converse.



From the third Tu b'Shevat up until the fourth, all the fruit of the tree was brought to the Temple as a first-fruit offering. Modeling this, **after Jesus establishes/plants His ministry and cleanses the Temple, He doesn't speak or teach there till after His third Tu b'Shevat**; but, now it will *dominate* His final year. **He's bringing the holy fruit of His fourth year to His Father. Every heart will produce either holy fruit or unholy thorns.**

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ... Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, **'I never knew you.'** – Matthew 7:19-23 NIV

Doesn't He mean, "You never knew Me"? He's God, how is it that *He* never knew *them*? Well thankfully, Paul provides the answer.

There are all sorts of languages ... If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, **I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.** [By saying *He never knew them*, Jesus is saying that they speak a different language] ... Brothers, **stop thinking like children.** [But, aren't we supposed to *become* like children? Yes. But, only as a *starting point*] **In regard to evil be [i.e. remain as] infants, but in your thinking be [i.e. become] adults.** [How? Grow up. Mature. And, learn to speak the true tongue of your Father] In the Law it is written: **"Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, [i.e. prophets and prophecies and parables]** but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. – 1 Corinthians 14:10-11, 20-21 NIV

We get so angry because God won't answer us when we talk to Him. **Thing is, He's already spoken everything that needs to be said. He's the One waiting for us to learn to talk ... so we can hear.** If we don't bear fruit by our 4th Tu b'Shevat, **we need to become like a child, learn His language, and stop thinking like a child.**

Like the tree's advocate in the parable, Jesus spends this year doing everything He can to break up the hard ground to penetrate and irrigate and nourish the roots of the fig tree.

Just before the fourth Tu b'Shevat, Jesus makes a last ditch effort and goes to the Temple and declares that He's the Light of the world and the Son of God ... so they try to stone Him. He flees from the Temple and immediately heals the man born blind, who confronts 'em about Jesus; so they excommunicate Him. Then, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead! (John 8-11)

So from that day on they plotted to take his life. Therefore **[on or near His 4th Tu b'Shevat]** Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew ... – John 11:53-54 NIV

Two months later He dies on the cross; but, on His 4th Tu b'Shevat, He cuts off the unfruitful figs who refuse to repent. Then, one week before the cross, He returns to condemn these fruitless Pharisees; and, on His way to the Temple to do so ...

Seeing in the distance a fig tree **in leaf**, **[two months early]** he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, **because it was not the season for figs.** **[Or leaves,** for that matter. Just as it was two months before the fruitful covering of Christ would come, after He died, rose, and sent His Holy Spirit at Pentecost] Then he said to the tree, **“May no one ever eat fruit from you again.”** **[Like the fruitless Pharisees, it had the appearance of fruitfulness, but it was an external covering without the fruit of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23)]** ... In the morning ... they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. **[Not yourself]** – Mark 11:12-14, 20-22 NIV



He wants to establish you, settle you, care for you, tend to you, give you shade and rest, and help you produce sweet fruit. But, that requires becoming His *child* and learning *His* heart. **It's much easier to just throw on some leaves and take cover.**



We've been doing it since day one. In the *original garden* (or as I like to call it: *home*), Adam and Eve tried to hide among the trees. *What kind of trees?* Well, they covered themselves in *fig leaves*.

A few weeks ago, when Jesus said He came, not to bring peace, but fire and a sword, we read the prophecy about those who ...

... dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. ... I will take away their harvest, declares the Lord. There will be **no grapes on the vine.** **[Because their branch is cut off]** There will be **no figs on the tree,** **[because their heart is a thornbush]** and **their leaves will wither.** **[Because they won't receive the living water of His Word]** **What I have given them will be taken from them.** **[Because, there's a deadline]** – Jeremiah 8:10b-13 NIV

If someone thinks they're covered, but doesn't bear and share the fruit of His Spirit from the abundance of their heart, by the end of their fourth Tu b'Shevat, they're livin' a leaf-life.

We can look the part; but, He knows if we speak His language. “[*He's*] not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:9) **But, in the end ... if they won't bear fruit, He must uproot.**

He welcomes late bloomers with open arms; but, you got'a blossom before your deadline!

Today, as everyone *leaves*, will there be *fruit*, or just *leaves*?