



[Matthew 21:18-19](#)

(18) Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. (19) Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

[Mark 11:12-14](#)

(12) The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. (13) Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, 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. (14) Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

New International Version

The various commentaries provide a wealth of additional information to help us better understand this event, as the Bible leaves out a great deal that its authors expected their contemporary readers to know. With many years and thousands of miles of geography between us and the area of Jerusalem in AD 31, it behooves us to seek out expert help in this matter. With these added pieces of information, we can understand that [Jesus'](#) cursing of the fig tree was reasonable and an example for us.

Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible* explains that the tree that Jesus cursed was a peculiar fig tree among the many that could be found in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives. There were so many fig trees in that area that it was known as Bethpage—"House of Figs." This particular tree was unique because of the abundance of leaves—an indication of abundant fruit—but it had none. It was all show.

Adam Clarke's commentary on [Mark 11:13](#) points out that the phrase "the time of figs was not yet" would be better translated to emphasize that the time for *gathering* figs had not yet come. Clarke cites a similar phrase in [Psalm 1:3](#) as support. He also indicates

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Matthew 21:18-19 (<http://www.theberean.org>) that the climate in the area of Jerusalem was such that figs could be found throughout the year, especially in March and April, making it not unreasonable to expect to find fruit then. However, figs are not usually harvested until after Passover—all the more reason to expect to find some on this tree.

Clarke further contends that this fig tree was supposed to represent the state of the Jewish people—"that they professed the true religion and considered themselves the special people of God—but were only hypocrites having nothing of religion but the profession—an abundance of leaves but no fruit." Thus, he continues, "Jesus' cursing of the fig tree was intended as a warning of what was to come in the absence of [repentance](#); the total destruction and final ruin of the Jewish state at the hands of the Romans."

Clarke concludes that Jesus did not curse the fig tree out of resentment for disappointing Him by not having any fruit, but to emphasize to His disciples just how devastating God's wrath would be on the Jews, "who had now nearly filled up the measure of their iniquity." Further, it is an object lesson to everyone that [God](#) expects us to bear the fruit of righteousness, showing us the consequences of failing in that task.

Matthew Henry echoes this last lesson in his comment on [Mark 11:13](#):

Christ was willing to make an example of it, not to the *trees*, but to the *men*, of that generation, and therefore cursed it with that curse which is the reverse of the first blessing, *Be fruitful*; he said unto it, *Never let any man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever!*

These relevant facts inform us it was not a case that Jesus was annoyed and cursed the fig tree out of anger or disappointment as many have supposed. In fact, it was not an unreasonable act at all. No, the cursing of the fig tree turns out to be an act of God performed as a witness—like all the object lessons Jesus performed throughout His ministry. It was a stern warning to all who would fail to bear the fruit of righteousness, including—perhaps especially—us today!

The apostle Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 10:11](#), "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Jesus was following this principle in giving us an illustration of His words in [Matthew 7:19](#), "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (see also [John 15:6](#)). The cursing of the fig tree is a pointed exhortation from our Savior not to be found fruitless at His appearing because the dreaded [Lake of Fire](#) awaits those who taste of "the heavenly gift" of God and failing to grow, [fall away](#) (see

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[Hebrews 6:4-6](#); [Revelation 20:15](#); [21:8](#)).

Basil, a fourth-century theologian, wrote in part, "A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. . . ." The deeds—the fruit—that God wants to see are the expressions of His Spirit working in us as we interact with others ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). As Christ Himself instructs us, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" ([John 15:8](#)).

This is what the Christian life is all about: growing and producing fruit that glorifies God. Thanks to that fig tree on the way to Jerusalem, we have a vivid example to keep us on the straight and narrow path to the Kingdom of God.

— Dan Elmore

To learn more, see:
[The Cursed Tree](#)

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