

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Fig Tree

XXVI. The Parable of the Fig Tree - Matthew 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31

A. The Central Point of the Parable

The time from the beginning of the birth pangs to the end of the tribulation will occur in such a short period of time that the generation that is alive when it starts will be alive when it ends.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The Fig Tree

The fig tree was a very common tree in that area. At that time these trees literally dotted the landscape. Because of this, they were commonly used in illustrations. Refer to Matthew 21:18-22, Judges 9:10-11, Hosea 9:10, Jeremiah 24:2, and Joel 1:7.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

None

D. Interpretation of the Parable

1. The Fig Tree

The use of the fig tree illustrates the nearness of summer. When the sap is flowing in the branches and the leaves begin to appear, summer is not far away. Therefore, what we have here is an illustration of nearness. This is also supported in verse 33.

2. "All these things" in verse 33

From the context we discover that "all these things" must refer back to the events Jesus had just finished describing. Specifically, they refer back to the birth pangs in verses 4-14, the abomination of desolation in verse 15, the necessity to flee in verse 16-28, and the heavenly wonders in verses 29-31.

3. "It" in verse 33

It must refer to the main subject of Christ's discourse. We know this from verse 3 as being the establishment of the Kingdom. *THIS IS ESSENTIAL IN UNDERSTANDING THIS PARABLE.*

We need to understand that the disciples were not looking for Christ's crucifixion, they were looking for the Kingdom. Interestingly enough, one of the prevalent views of that time was that the Messiah would destroy the temple and rebuild it prior to the establishment of the Kingdom. When

Christ mentions the destruction of the temple in verse 2, the disciple's natural question would be "when."

4. "This Generation" in verse 34

We know that the parable states that "this generation will not pass till all these things are fulfilled". Obviously, the entire point of the parable is to show the nearness of Christ's establishment of the Kingdom once "these things" start. Therefore, we also need to understand what "generation" means in order to completely understand what Christ was saying.

Several possibilities present themselves:

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1. The Disciples
2. Jewish Race
3. Those who reject Christ
4. The Nation of Israel
5. Those who see the start of the signs

Those who support number one fall into two main categories, those who say that Christ was wrong, and those who make the events of Matthew 24 and 25 refer to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Those who say Christ was wrong are in deep trouble and those who say it is A.D. 70 make Christ answer a question the disciples are not even asking. They want to know the start of the Millennial Kingdom, an event that obviously did not happen in A.D. 70.

Numbers two, three, and four have the problem that Christ used an obscure statement, i.e. "generation", to refer to them. The entire point of parables is to make things clear, not obscure. If he meant one of these groups, it would have been very easy to say so.

Number four has the problem in that it forces a foreign concept onto the disciples, namely, the restoration of the Jewish state. (This by the way is one of the most popular views). Unfortunately, this interpretation reads meaning into the text. There is no way the disciples would have understood the regathering of Israel into a nation in 1948.

The best interpretation, then, is number five. It is clear from the text of this parable that Christ is trying to say that the time between the beginning of the birth pangs to the establishment of the Kingdom is very short. He is answering the "when" question of the disciples.

This is further supported by the equating of the leaves in verse 32 with the "these things" in verse 24. Therefore, the "start" of "this generation" is the "birth pangs", and the "end" of "this generation" is the establishment of the Kingdom.

E. Application of the Parable

The time period between the beginning of the birth pangs and the establishment of the Kingdom is a very short time. It is so short, in fact, that those alive at the beginning will for the most part be alive at the end.