

The Fig Tree (Matthew 24:1-14,30-35)

Jesus' disciples assumed that Jerusalem's magnificent temple would stand until Christ returned; its destruction would coincide with the Last Day. Though the disciples were mistaken, Jesus taught them that the events preceding the temple's destruction served as vivid reminders of the coming of the "end of the age."

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ²"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

³⁰ "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth^[a] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

³² "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it^[e] is near, right at the door. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

1. What is your favorite season of the year? Why? What are the signs of its coming?

2. What lesson can be learned by observing a fig tree? Briefly explain the phrase “all these things” in verse 33. What lesson is to be learned from “all these things”?

3. Think about what you know concerning the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple foretold by Jesus. Why would (or should) the temple’s destruction have been such a soul-wrenching event for the Jews?

4. Jesus said that the signs of his coming would be seen in three realms: nature, society, and the church. List the signs in each of those realms and give current examples of each.

5. Agree or disagree. The world’s fig tree has “sprouted.”

6. Are Jesus’ words in this lesson words of warning, admonition, or comfort? Explain.

7. The Bible’s clear and repeated message is that no one knows “the day or the hour” of Christ’s return (Matthew 25:13). Nonetheless, a number of churches attempt to fix the moment of Jesus’ return. Discuss the dangers in doing so.

8. After reading the following passage, explain the word redemption. How will Christians react to the signs of Jesus’ return? “[Jesus said,] ‘At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near’ ” (Luke 21:27,28)