

THE GOOD AND THE BAD FIGS

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I. VISION OF FIGS (Jer 24:1-3)

A. Context

1. The period was during the reign of Zedekiah in 597 BC. He was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was taken into exile (2Ki 24:17).
2. This was Judah's second wave of deportation to Babylon and included Ezekiel the prophet.
3. Some have objected to this chapter because the idea of good figs among bad figs does not appear to fit with Jeremiah's attitude that all of Jerusalem was considered wicked (Jer 4:14).
4. However, this chapter does not view some in Judah as morally "good." Rather, there were some who were "good" in the sense of being useful to Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, there will be some from Judah who will receive "good" in the sense of receiving better than they deserved.

B. Time After Jeconiah's Captivity (1)

1. Jeremiah identified the time of the vision. It was some time after Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was taken into captivity.
2. Jeremiah's vision included **two baskets of figs** which were set before the Temple of the Lord.
3. King Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the best skilled **craftsmen** and **smiths** from Jerusalem (2Ki 24:14-16 cf. Isa 41:7 cf. 1Ki 6:20). He took them back to be useful for him in Babylon.
4. *The metals used in ancient Palestine included gold, silver, copper, lead, tin, and iron; practically all are mentioned in Jeremiah either literally or figuratively.* (Philip King, Jeremiah, An Archaeological Companion, pg.179)

C. Vision of the Good and Bad Figs (2-3)

1. One of the baskets contained **good figs**, that is, those which came from the first harvest.
 - a. Figs in Israel are harvested two times a year. The first harvest ripens in June (Isa 28:4; Hos 9:10).
 - b. The **first-ripe figs** are especially juicy and considered a delicacy.
2. The other basket was full of **bad figs** which were rotten and could not be eaten.
3. Jeremiah was questioned by the Lord as to what he observed in the vision (cf. Jer 1:11, 13). Jeremiah observed that the good figs were of the best quality and the bad figs were so **rotten** they could not be eaten.
4. General facts about figs
 - a. *Growing to nearly 20 feet in height and with large leaves, the fig tree provides pleasant shade. Minute wasps cultivate these trees, and the fig is produced before the leaves emerge. The flower of the tree is never seen, as its many tiny flowers are housed within the fruit bud. Two crops are produced each year. The first crop is eaten fresh, while the second crop is dried for winter...[T]he fig tree was extremely important for both nutritional and economic reasons in ancient times* (BiblePlaces.com).
 - b. *Figs correspond to netzach (endurance), which engenders longevity. The fig tree reflects everlasting fruitfulness as it has one of the longest periods of ripening, spanning more than three months... Maimonides [Jewish philosopher and physician] taught that figs alleviate constipation, which is one of the main tenets of longevity and health. Figs may benefit the elderly by strengthening the blood and arousing vitality* (Siegelbaun, The Seven Species).
 - c. *Modern science affirms the nutritional benefits of figs: they are very rich in minerals, especially potassium, iron, and calcium, and they contain omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Figs also contain phytosterols, which inhibit the absorption of dietary cholesterol, thus decreasing the total levels of cholesterol. Moreover, they may help prevent certain types of cancers* (Siegelbaun, The Seven Species).
5. References to figs in the Bible
 - a. Figs are the first fruit to be mentioned in the Scriptures. After sinning, Adam and Eve sewed "fig leaves" as loin coverings (Gen 3:7).
 - b. Figs were included among the seven foods which the Lord would give Israel in the promised land (Deu 8:8).

- c. Figs were sometimes made into fig cakes and were given to revitalize the body (1Sa 30:12).
- d. Fig trees can be a sign of blessing from the Lord through peaceful comfort as in the shade from the leaves. They can also be a sign of prosperity when everyone has his own fig tree (1Ki 4:25).
- e. On the other hand, figs can represent the judgment of the Lord as in the destroying of fig trees (Jer 5:17; Jer 24:8).
- f. Jesus cursed the unfruitful fig tree (Mar 11:12-14).
- g. Stars will fall from the heavens like unripe figs shaken by the wind (Rev 6:13).

II. VISION OF GOOD FIGS EXPLAINED (Jer 24:4-7)

A. Explanation of the Vision (4-5)

- 1. Again, we have the phrase, “**the word of the LORD came**” to Jeremiah (4). This is a revelatory vision that is given to the prophet and is passed on to God’s people without error.
- 2. The Lord explained the meaning of the vision to Jeremiah (5).
 - a. The **captives of Judah** that went in the second wave of deportation (Jeconiah, king of Judah 597 BC) would be like the good figs.
 - b. Not because they were morally good, but because they were good in the sense of being useful to Nebuchadnezzar.

B. Lord will set His eyes for good (6)

- 1. Even though Jeconiah’s group was taken captive, they will be part of the Lord’s remnant for good.
- 2. They would see good, not because of their piety and godliness, but because of the Lord’s favor (grace).
- 3. The Lord would **bring them again** into the promised land (Jer 29:4-7).
- 4. The Lord would **build them up** in Babylon and return them to Jerusalem (Ezr 1:3).

C. Lord will give them a heart (7)

- 1. In addition to reinstatement and the rebuilding of the Temple, the Lord would spiritually revitalize them.
- 2. The Lord would give them a **heart to know Him**.
- 3. The Lord would take them back as **His people** and the Lord would be their God.
- 4. They would return **whole-heartedly** to the Lord and ultimately fulfilled in Jer 31:31-34.

III. VISION OF BAD FIGS EXPLAINED (Jer 24:8-10)

A. Zedekiah Will be Abandoned (8)

- 1. The **bad figs** would be King Zedekiah, who did evil in the sight of the Lord (2Ki 24:17-20).
- 2. The bad figs would include those who were left in Jerusalem until the third wave of deportation in 586 BC.
- 3. They should have repented knowing that the word of the prophet Jeremiah had partially come true during the second wave of deportation.
- 4. They may have thought they were blessed by the Lord because they were not in captivity. However, they were **rotten** spiritually and bad circumstances would come upon them more than those who were deported in the second wave.
- 5. King Zedekiah, his officials, and the people would be **abandoned** and receive the full brunt of judgment.

B. Zedekiah Will be a Reproach (9)

- 1. Instead of being God’s remnant for good, they would be a **remnant** for bad.
- 2. Those in the third wave of deportation would become a **reproach and a proverb**.
- 3. They will be remembered as the ones who did not return to the Lord and were taken into captivity.

C. Sword and Famine Will be Sent (10)

- 1. Not only would they be taken into captivity, but many would be killed by the **swords** of the Babylonians.
- 2. If the sword did not get them, **famine** and **pestilence** would.
- 3. They would be **destroyed** from ever returning to the promised **land**. Zedekiah himself will die in blindness, shame, without a throne, and in exile (Jer 34:4; 2Ki 25:6–7; Eze12:13).

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. God’s remnants of glory and wrath (Rom 9:22-23)

- 1. All deserve the wrath of God (Rom 3:23; 6:23).
- 2. Yet, there will be some vessels by God’s grace prepared for glory (Rom 9:23).

3. While at the same time, there will be some vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (Rom 9:22).
- B. Lord Works All Things for Good (Rom 8:28)
1. The Lord works all things ultimately for His glory.
 2. The Lord also works all things together for the good of those who have trusted in Christ. They are the ones who love God and are called according to His purpose.
 3. However, the Lord does not work all things for good for those who reject Him.
- C. Useful as a Fig Tree
1. In Mat 21:18-19, Jesus cursed a fig tree that did not produce fruit.
 2. *Immediately...is a relative term; the tree may have died at once, but Mark 11:14, 20 (see note there) suggested that the withering was not visible until the following day. Jesus' cursing of the tree was a purposeful divine object lesson, not an impetuous act of frustration. The fig tree is often employed in Scripture as a symbol of Israel (Hos. 9:10; Joel 1:7)—and the barren fig tree often symbolizes divine judgment on Israel because of her spiritual fruitlessness (see note on 3:8) despite an abundance of spiritual advantages (Jer. 8:13; Joel 1:12). Jesus' act therefore illustrates God's judgment against earthly Israel for shameful fruitlessness, exemplified in the rejection of their Messiah. One of Christ's parables taught a similar lesson (Luke 13:6–9) (MSB in Mat 21:19).*
 3. *Through Zechariah the Lord promised His people that at Messiah's second coming, He would "remove the iniquity of that land in one day" and "every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree" (Zech. 3:9–10). A favorite place for people to gather was under a fig tree (MacArthur).*
 4. Believers can produce fruit through the Lord but cannot produce fruit without the Lord (Joh 15:1-5).