

# Bite Size Bible Study

## Fig Tree #198

By Pastor Lee

There are some things that Jesus said, or did, that give me a “brain pain” (English idiom). I can’t figure them out. One of these is when He cursed the fig tree.

I have learned that He often spoke in the idioms of His culture. That is where I seem to very frequently “loose it” (another English idiom). I don’t know the Hebrew idioms and have not yet found a dictionary of them. The internet has some of them but almost never the one I need.

In one of Mark’s recent sermons, I got a clue to one of these idioms “Under the fig tree”. Mark showed that this meant among other things, abundant food, and protection. He cited Deut. 8:6-9 NIV:

*Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.*

This was a promise of a good abundant life for Israel if they would keep the covenant.

Here is the one that has “bugged me” (another idiom) for decades. Matthew 21:18-20 NIV

### Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

*Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 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. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.*

This is around the time of the Passover. That means that it is early spring. Why would Jesus curse a tree knowing that it was not the season for fruit? The tree was doing exactly what it should be doing. It was in leaf but not ready to fruit.

To get the context of what was happening we need to look back at the preceding verses. Matthew 21:12-13

### Jesus at the Temple

*Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”*

The idiom “fig tree” is often understood as referring to Israel. Now we can see that Jesus was showing that Israel was not producing fruit (idiom) but had become a “den of robbers” (idiom for corrupt).

If we begin to add together Deuteronomy 8 and Matthew 21, we can see that Israel was no longer living in the good abundant life that God promised them if they would follow the covenant. But they were stealing, coveting riches, and following other gods, all for individual positions of honor because of their riches. The temple that God had provided was then nothing more than a marketplace. The “sacrifices and offerings” meant little to the majority of those in charge of the temple.

Isaiah prophesied about how offerings with no heart (idiom), were detestable to God.

*Hear the word of the Lord,  
you rulers of Sodom (idiom for sinfulness);  
listen to the instruction of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah! (idiom for sinfulness)  
“The multitude of your sacrifices—  
what are they to me?” says the Lord.  
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure  
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
When you come to appear before me,  
who has asked this of you,  
this trampling of my courts?*

Isaiah 1:10-12 NIV

I believe when Jesus said: “May you never bear fruit again!” He was talking about the “sour fruit” (idiom) Israel was bearing at that time. Because of other scriptures it can’t mean that Israel would never bear fruit again at some time in the future. Israel is His chosen and they are bound in covenant.

As you can see from the number of times that I have mentioned idiom, complete understanding is not as easy as a quick read. We speak in English idioms, so it should not be any surprise that Hebrew speech would be any different. The major problem is that our idioms are not their idioms, and their idioms are not our idioms.

Trying to understand scripture written in another language, culture, and time; requires a careful reading to get the understanding of the author.