

Jeremiah 24:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil.

Analysis

Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah?—God's question engages the prophet in interpretation, a pedagogical method seen throughout Scripture (Amos 7:8, 8:2; Zechariah 4:2, 5:2). The question tests understanding and prepares Jeremiah to explain the vision. God doesn't merely show visions but ensures prophets comprehend their meaning before proclaiming them.

And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil—Jeremiah's response mirrors the vision's stark contrast. His threefold emphasis on the bad figs' condition ("evil, very evil... cannot be eaten, they are so evil") underscores their absolute worthlessness. The Hebrew *ra'* (רָע, evil/bad) appears three times, creating rhetorical intensity. This repetition prepares for the devastating application in verses 8-10: the "bad figs" represent King Zedekiah, Jerusalem's officials, and those who remained in Judah or fled to Egypt—all facing destruction. The vision's simplicity makes its message unmistakable: God has rendered final judgment on these two groups.

Historical Context

When Jeremiah received this vision, Jerusalem still stood, the temple still functioned, and Zedekiah still reigned—all appearances suggested God's continued favor on those in the land. The exiles in Babylon seemed cursed, living among pagans, unable to offer temple sacrifices, separated from the land God promised

Abraham. Yet God's verdict reversed these assumptions completely. The explanation in verses 5-7 reveals that God would set His eyes on the exiles "for good," return them to the land, build them, plant them, and give them hearts to know Him. Meanwhile, those in Jerusalem would become "a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse" (v. 9), destroyed by sword, famine, and pestilence. History vindicated this prophecy: Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the Babylonian exiles returned under Cyrus's decree in 538 BC to rebuild.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does God's question to Jeremiah teach about how He prepares His servants to deliver difficult messages?
2. How should the stark "good/evil" binary in this vision inform our understanding of covenant faithfulness versus unfaithfulness?
3. In what ways might religious people today resemble the "bad figs"—externally positioned in God's community but internally corrupt?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַרְתִּי	יְהוָה	אֵלַי	מָה	אַתָּה	רְאֵה	יִרְמְיָהוּ
And I said	the LORD	H413	H4100	H859	unto me What seest	thou Jeremiah
H559	H3068				H7200	H3414
וְאָמַרְתִּי	הַתְּאֵנִים	יִם	הַתְּאֵנִים	טֹב	טֹב	מָאֵד
And I said	Figs		Figs	good	good	very
H559	H8384		H8384	H2896	H2896	H3966
וְאָמַרְתִּי	הַתְּאֵנִים	יִם	הַתְּאֵנִים	טֹב	טֹב	מָאֵד
and the evil	very	H834	H3808	that cannot be eaten	they are so evil	
H7451	H3966			H398	H7455	

Additional Cross-References

Amos 8:2 (References Lord): And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.

Zechariah 4:2 (Parallel theme): And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: