

Luke 21:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;

Analysis

And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees. Jesus shifts pedagogical methods—after prophetic discourse, He employs parable (parabolēn, παραβολήν)—an earthly story illustrating spiritual truth. The imperative idete (ἴδετε, "behold") commands attention to observable natural phenomena. The phrase tēn sykēn kai panta ta dendra (τὴν συκῆν καὶ πάντα τὰ δένδρα, "the fig tree and all the trees") references familiar agricultural signs.

The fig tree (sykē, συκῆ) had particular significance in Jewish culture—a symbol of Israel's national life (Jeremiah 8:13, Hosea 9:10, Joel 1:7). Jesus cursed a barren fig tree earlier (Luke 13:6-9, Mark 11:12-14), symbolizing Israel's spiritual fruitlessness. Yet here the fig tree illustrates a simple principle of discernment: observable signs precede predictable outcomes. The inclusion of "all the trees" universalizes the principle—it's not unique to figs but applies to all deciduous trees in Palestine's climate.

This parable teaches believers to read providential signs. Just as budding trees signal summer's approach, prophetic fulfillments signal the kingdom's nearness. The simplicity is intentional—discernment doesn't require sophisticated theology, just basic observation and application. Children understand seasonal cycles; believers should equally recognize eschatological signs.

Historical Context

Palestinian fig trees lose leaves in winter and bud in spring, signaling approaching summer harvest. This agricultural cycle was intimately familiar to Jesus' audience —farmers, fishermen, and villagers whose livelihood depended on seasonal awareness. The parable's force lies in applying common-sense observation to spiritual realities. Just as no one mistakes budding trees for approaching winter, believers shouldn't miss the significance of prophetic signs. Early church applied this principle to both AD 70 destruction (which occurred within the generation, v. 32) and Christ's eventual return. The fig tree's association with Israel led some interpreters to see Israel's 1948 restoration as prophetic fulfillment, though this remains debated.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does the simplicity of Jesus' parable teach about the accessibility of biblical prophecy and the responsibility to discern signs?
2. How does the fig tree's symbolic association with Israel inform interpretation of Jesus' eschatological teaching?
3. What 'signs' in contemporary culture and world events might indicate the approaching fulfillment of biblical prophecy?

Interlinear Text

καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς· Ἰδετε τὴν συκῆν καὶ

And he spake a parable to them Behold the fig tree And

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πάντα τὰ δένδρα·

all the trees

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