

Luke 3:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Analysis

John's warning 'now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees' emphasizes judgment's immediacy and thoroughness. The present tense 'is laid' indicates current, not future threat—judgment is poised to fall. The 'root' (not just branches) suggests complete destruction, not mere pruning. The agricultural metaphor—'every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire'—teaches that profession without fruit results in destruction. This anticipates Jesus's parables about fruit-bearing (Luke 13:6-9; John 15:1-6) and final judgment. The imagery emphasizes that mere religious identity (Jewish descent) or profession without transformed life leads to condemnation. Genuine repentance produces visible fruit.

Historical Context

John's threat of imminent judgment challenged Jewish confidence in ethnic privilege. The imagery of trees cut down and burned would resonate with agricultural listeners familiar with clearing unproductive orchards. His warning prepared for Jesus's teaching about fruit inspection as test of genuine discipleship.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does the axe at the root teach about judgment's thoroughness and imminence?
2. How does genuine repentance express itself in 'good fruit' of transformed living?
3. Why is religious profession or ethnic identity insufficient without fruit-bearing faith?

Interlinear Text

ἡδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρον
now And also the axe unto the root of the trees
G2235 G1161 G2532 G3588 G513 G4314 G3588 G4491 G3588 G1186

κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν
is laid every therefore of the trees not forth fruit good
G2749 G3956 G3767 G1186 G3361 G4160 G2590 G2570

ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται
is hewn down also into the fire cast
G1581 G2532 G1519 G4442 G906

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 7:19 (Good): Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

John 15:6 (Parallel theme): If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Luke 13:9 (Parallel theme): And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Matthew 3:10 (Good): And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Luke 13:7 (Parallel theme): Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

Hebrews 12:29 (Parallel theme): For our God is a consuming fire.

Ezekiel 31:18 (Parallel theme): To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.

Daniel 4:23 (Parallel theme): And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him;

Daniel 4:14 (Parallel theme): He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: