

Matthew 3:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The imagery of the axe at the tree's root emphasizes the imminent nature of God's judgment and the urgency of repentance. The present tense 'is laid' indicates judgment is not distant but immediately impending. Trees that fail to produce good fruit will be 'hewn down'—covenant language for divine rejection (Jeremiah 11:16-17). The fire represents eternal judgment, not merely temporal discipline. This sobering warning demolishes presumption and demands immediate response.

Historical Context

This warning anticipated both the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem (temporal judgment on unbelieving Israel) and the final eschatological judgment. John's ministry occurred approximately 40 years before Jerusalem's fall, the biblical generation of warning.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the imminence of judgment create urgency for repentance and gospel proclamation?
2. What does the imagery of fruitless trees being burned teach about the eternal destiny of those who profess faith without transformation?

Interlinear Text

ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ῥίζαν τῶν δένδρων
now **And** **also** G3588 **the axe** **unto** G3588 **the root** G3588 **of the trees**
G2235 G1161 G2532 G513 G4314 G4491 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

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 3:9 (Good): 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.

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

John 15:2 (Parallel theme): Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Jeremiah 17:8 (Parallel theme): For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Hebrews 6:8 (Parallel theme): But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Psalms 1:3 (Parallel theme): And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Matthew 21:19 (Parallel theme): And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

Luke 23:31 (Parallel theme): For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Malachi 4:1 (Parallel theme): For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.