

**Jer. 24, The Parable of the Figs**  
**May 26, 1990**  
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**Overview**

1. Historical Context: the Last Kings of Judah

Name	In	How?	Out	How?
a) Josiah	640		609	Died (Necho)
b) Jehoahaz (Shallum) s.Josiah	609	People	609	Egypt
c) Jehoiakim s.Josiah	609	Egypt	597	Died
d) Jehoiachin (Coniah) s.J'kim	597	(People)	597	Babylon
e) Zedekiah s.Josiah	597	Babylon	586	Babylon

2. The sections:

The references to the kings in these sections, as well as explicit dates, show that the king's mission is actually AFTER the utterances of ch. 22-24. This order emphasizes the disbelief of the king. Even after Jer. has come to him and given him explicit warning, he still persists in his vain hope of salvation.

a) 21:1-10, The King's Request, late in the reign of Zedekiah, ca. 588 BC. "Tell us what's going to happen." Why come to Jer. now? Because he hasn't listened to him before, and he finally sees that the false prophets have been wrong. This request sets the scene for the rest of 21-24.

b) 21:11-23:40, Earlier oracles against the Civil and Religious Leaders. Zedekiah, you should already know the answer.

1) 21:11-23:8 "Concerning the Royal House:" I have already warned you of judgment; you did not heed me. Shallum has already been taken captive, and Jehoiakim is not yet dead, so this is during the reign of Jehoiakim.

2) 23:9-40 "Concerning the Prophets" (includes condemnation of the priests): Those whom you did heed are not trustworthy, and you have already been warned about that!

c) 24:1-10, Back to the time of Zedekiah. Is this in answer to the request in 21? It does show that God will indeed be gracious to his people, but Zedekiah will be destroyed. Even this oracle seems to be earlier than the request: the deportation of Jeconiah, mentioned in v.1, begins Zed's reign. Zed really should have known the answer to his question before he asked it!

3. Structure of ch. 24: a vision of two baskets of figs, one good and one rotten, followed by the interpretation of each basket. The vision takes place just after the deportation of Jeconiah to Babylon, the second of the three great deportations.

Those who escaped the second deportation thought of the exiles as

under God's curse, and themselves as particularly blessed. This sort of reasoning may have informed Zed's original question in 21; in spite of all Jer's warnings, he was still hoping for deliverance, because (after all), he hadn't been taken away captive. The message is that God's blessing will be on those who are in the second deportation; but those in the third are under his curse.

#### A. 1-2, The Vision

##### 1. The overall setting, 1-2

- a) The containers: not the usual word for "basket." Used in 1 Sam. 2:14 and 2 Chr. 35:13 of a container for sacrifices. The association with the temple here makes this likely in this place also.
- b) Figs; the fruit of the ground, the firstfruits of which were to be offered to the Lord, Deut. 26:2.
- c) "Set before the temple." A very rare word, meaning "appointed" or "arranged." They are not just standing there, but have been arranged in a special way.
- d) The time notice. This is not when Jer saw this, but when the baskets were standing there. The image is that Neb comes into town, rounds up the leaders of the people (king, princes, craftsmen, smiths), and takes them away, and after the dust settles, there before the temple are these two pots of figs.
- e) The good figs are compared to the first-ripe figs, the juiciest (and also the most desired, after a winter without them).
- f) The bad figs are so rotten, you can't get them into your mouth.
- g) *Summary:* The word for "basket," the location in the temple, and the emphasis on how the containers were arranged, all suggest that these figs are being presented as an offering. They would be a firstfruits offering.

##### 2. The important features, 3

Out of this mass of detail, one feature impresses itself on Jer's mind: the difference in quality between the two classes of figs. One of the containers was a worthy sacrifice, the finest of the figs. The other was utterly unworthy as an offering to the Lord.

#### B. People as an Offering

A glance ahead at the interpretation shows that these two baskets of figs are compared to two groups of people. Let's pause and ask why one would use the metaphor of the firstfruit offering to describe the people of God.

1. This is not the first or only time this metaphor is used. The scriptures several times compare God's people to the Firstfruit offering, perhaps most clearly earlier in Jer.
  - a) JER 2:3 Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.
  - b) HOS 9:10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved.
  - c) JAM 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.
2. What is the point of this comparison? God owns all the produce of the field--"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. . . . If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 50:10,12). Yet he commands that the firstfruits of the earth be devoted to him. All people belong to God, but there is a special group, the redeemed, that are particularly his, devoted to his personal use. Such was Israel in the OT; such are Christians today.
3. *Application:* More generally, cf. Rom. 12:1,2. We are to consider ourselves as an offering to God, and maintain our purity accordingly. We are God's special possession. When we disobey him, we are marring his property, depriving him of the full enjoyment of what belongs to him. Too often we think that salvation exists first of all for our enjoyment. In fact, it exists first of all for God's enjoyment, though as a result we are unspeakably blessed by it.
4. So now the point of the vision becomes clearer. The people who are God's Firstfruits come in two classes. One class is what an offering should be. The other is unacceptable, an insult to God, and meriting his wrath.

If you had been in Jerusalem when Jeconiah was taken captive in 597, where would you have seen the focus of God's wrath? On those who were taken away, or on those who remained? The natural tendency no doubt was for those left in Jerusalem to pride themselves on being left, but Jer. shows that they are the rotten figs!

#### C. 4-7, Interpretation of the Good Figs

Good figs are a choice treasure. One joyfully plans what to do with them: make them into fig newtons, eat them fresh, stew them with a little lemon. So God makes careful plans for the people who find grace in his eyes.

1. 5-6a, God's gracious purposes

Two clauses emphasize the general point of this paragraph: that God considers his people for good; sets his eye upon them for good. That is, he gives special attention to them with the purpose of doing good to them.

*Application:* v.5 emphasizes that those for whom he plans good are those whom he has sent away into captivity. It is through no merit of their own that they receive his gracious attention. They are sinful, and have been sent away as chastisement for their sin. But God will be gracious to them.

God's blessing to them takes two forms: one material; one spiritual.

2. 6b, Material Blessing

God will build and plant them once again upon "this land," the land of Israel. Recall the three possibilities that we are tracking for such promises:

- a) Is it fulfilled in the restoration under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah? Note the promises that this restoration will be permanent: "build and not pull down; plant and not pluck up." Though some of the Jews did return at the end of the captivity, they were scattered again under Rome in 70 and 132 AD. Thus the restoration cannot fulfill this promise.
- b) Is it abrogated when the Jews reject the Messiah? But note that this promise is already in spite of their sin, not because of their piety. It is not a conditional reward for merit, but an unconditional gift of grace. In fact, part of the gift (next section) is a heart of submission. If this promise can be abrogated, so can any of God's promises.
- c) Seems best to take this as a promise of a future residence of the Jews in "this land," the land of Israel.

3. 7, Spiritual Blessing

Note three steps. Each is applicable to us today.

- a) God gives them a heart to know him. No merit of their own. He provides faith within them.

*Application:* We cannot please God in our own strength. Our heart is rebellious against him. He must give us a new heart; otherwise we cannot please him. When we recognize this, we mourn over our sin; this is repentance.

- b) They turn to him "with all their heart," their new heart. God's gift of salvation manifests itself through our turning to him.

*Application:* We must turn to the Lord and serve him. Otherwise we have no claim on his salvation.

- c) Establishment of the "people-God" relationship. This is the theological center of the OT, outlined at Sinai (Lev. 26:12) from pieces revealed earlier (see Kaiser, OT Theo, 32ff). It carries through to the NT: 2 Cor. 6:16.

*Application:* This blessed relation is our privilege today.

#### D. 8-10, Interpretation of the Bad Figs

1. 8, Who are they? Contrast v.1.
  - a) Zed. (in contrast to Jeconiah)
  - b) His princes (in contrast to J's princes)
  - c) Those who remain in Jerusalem (in contrast to the carpenters and smiths)
  - d) Those who have fled to Egypt to escape Neb.
2. 9, What is God's purpose toward them? Contrast this with 5-6a.
  - a) Not good, but trembling and evil
  - b) They will become a swearword: reproach, proverb, taunt, curse. People will make fun of them and treat them with contempt. Just as we say, "you dirty dog," so people will show their despite for someone by calling him a Jew.
  - c) Both of these threats are in the context of exile: "all the kingdoms of the earth;" "all places whither I shall drive them."
3. 10, Specifically, he brings upon them the curses of Lev. 26 that we studied in chh. 14ff. While the good figs of vv. 4-7 will be returned to the land from which they have been exiled, the bad figs of 8-10 will themselves be driven off it, and with much more suffering than was experienced by the good figs.

#### **Application**

Outward circumstances are not a reliable guide to how pleased the Lord is with us. In 597, a segment of Jerusalem's population was taken into exile, and those who left behind thought that they remained because God was being favorable toward them. What they did not realize, and what Jer here points out, is that the first group suffers only exile, but the second group awaits sword, famine, and pestilence, and then exile too.

In the world's terms, we as a church are small and weak. We have been despised by those who once loved us, and it's easy to fall into the temptation to be discouraged and wonder what God is doing. But the story is not over yet. If we serve the Lord with all our heart, he will glorify himself through us; and the time will come when those who despise us and follow man's ways rather than the Word of God will find themselves far smaller and weaker than we are. The point, of course, is not to glory in this prospect, but to recognize that the important thing is not our outward circumstances, but how faithful we are to God's Word as he has revealed it to us. Let us see to it that we are good figs, the Lord's firstfruits, holiness to him, and he will provide the outward recognition in his time.

**Analysis**

24:1-10, interpretation p: Parable of the Figs: The righteous and unrighteous exiles. The judgment falls on the royal house and leading citizens.

A. figure: awareness p

1. awareness quote f: 24:1 HIR:)/ANIY Y:HWFH
2. awareness quote: W:/HIN."H
  - a) temporal p
    - 1) text: \$:N"Y D.W.DF)"Y T:)"NIYM MW.(FDIYM LI/P:N"Y H"YKAL Y:HWFH
    - 2) time: )AX:AR"Y 2Kings 24:10ff, second deportation 597
      - a> HAG:LOWT N:BW.KAD:RE)C.AR MELEK:-B.FBEL )ET-Y:KFN:YFHW. BEN-Y:HOWYFQIYM MELEK:-Y:HW.DFH W:/)ET-&FR"Y Y:HW.DFH W:/)ET-HE/XFRF\$ W:/)ET-HA/M.AS:G."R MI/YRW.\$FLAIM
      - b> WA/Y:BI)/"M B.FBEL
  - b) 24:2 HA/D.W.D )EXFD T.:)"NIYM +OBOWT M:)OD K.I/T:)"N"Y HA/B.AK.UROWT
  - c) W:/HA/D.W.D )EXFD T.:)"NIYM RF(OWT M:)OD ):A\$ER LO)-T")FKAL:NFH M"/RO(A S

B. interpretation: interaction p

1. iu: quote p
  - a) quote f: 24:3 WA/Y.O)MER Y:HWFH )"L/AY
  - b) quote: MFH-)AT.FH RO)EH YIR:M:YFHW.
2. cu: quote p
  - a) quote f: WF/)OMAR
  - b) quote:
    - 1) T.:)"NIYM
    - 2) HA/T.:)"NIYM HA/+.OBOWT +OBOWT M:)OD
    - 3) W:/HF/RF(OWT RF(OWT M:)OD ):A\$ER LO)-T")FKAL:NFH M"/RO(A P
3. ru: quote p
  - a) quote f: 24:4 WA/Y:HIY D:BAR-Y:HWFH )"L/AY L"/)MOR
  - b) quote: quote p
    - 1) quote f: 24:5 K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH ):ELOH"Y YI&:RF)"L
    - 2) quote: coordination p
      - a> comparison p
        - 1> figure: K.A/T.:)"NIYM HA/+.OBOWT HF/)"L.EH
        - 2> interpretation: K."N-
          - a: )AK.IYR )ET-G.FLW.T Y:HW.DFH ):A\$ER \$IL.AX:T.IY MIN-HA/M.FQOWM HA/Z.EH )EREC K.A&:D.IYM L:/+OWBFH
          - b: 24:6 W:/&AM:T.IY ("YNIY (:AL"Y/HEM L:/+OWBFH
          - c: WA/H:A\$IBOTIYM (AL-HF/)FREC HA/Z.O)T
          - d: W./B:NIYTIY/M
          - e: W:/LO) )EH:EROS
          - f: W./N:+A(:T.IY/M
          - g: W:/LO) )ET.OW\$
          - h: 24:7 W:/NFTAT.IY L/FHEM L"B LF/DA(AT )OT/IY K.IY ):ANIY Y:HWFH
          - i: W:/HFYW.-L/IY L:/(FM

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j: W:/)FNOKIY )EH:YEH L/FHEM L"/)LOHIYM
k: K.IY-YF$UBW. )"L/AY B.:/KFL-LIB./FM S
b> comparison p
1> figure: 24:8 W:/KA/T.:)"NIYM HF/RF(OWT ):A$ER
LO)-T")FKAL:NFH M"/RO(A
2> interpretation: quote p
a: quote f: K.IY-KOH )FMAR Y:HWFH
b: quote: K."N
1: )ET."N )ET-CID:QIY.FHW. MELEK:-Y:HW.DFH
W:/)ET-&FRFY/W W:/)"T $:)"RIYT Y:RW.$FLAIM
HA/N.I$:)FRIYM B.F/)FREC HA/Z.O)T
W:/HA/Y.O$:BIYM B.:/)EREC MIC:RFYIM
2: 24:9 W./N:TAT.IY/M {LI/Z:WF(FH} [L:/ZA(:AWFH]
L:/RF(FH L:/KOL MAM:L:KOWT HF/)FREC L:/XER:P.FH
W./L:/MF$FL LI/$:NIYNFH W:/LI/Q:LFLFH
B.:/KFL-HA/M.:QOMOWT ):A$ER-)AD.IYX/"M $FM
3: 24:10 W:/$IL.AX:T.IY B/FM )ET-HA/XEREB
)ET-HF/RF(FB W:/)ET-HA/D.FBER (AD-T.UM./FM
M"/(AL HF/):ADFMFH ):A$ER-NFTAT.IY L/FHEM
W:/LA/):ABOWT"Y/HEM P

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