The Figs are Speaking

An Examination of the Biblical Imagery and Symbolism of the Common Fig (*Ficus carica*) and the Sycamore Fig (*Ficus sycomorus*) in Relation to the Temple Destruction, the Second Coming and the Story of Zacchaeus.

by Simon Scott

**Abstract**

The common fig (*Ficus carica*) and the sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*) contribute to the understanding of the depth of revelation of God’s kingdom in the Bible. These trees provide meaning to the Bible through their symbolism and depiction of imagery (e.g. as a symbol of Israel, for prosperity, faithfulness, security, peace, fertility and resurrection).

This study examines the relevance of the symbolism and imagery of these trees in relation to the themes of Temple destruction (Matthew 21: 12-22, Mark 11: 12-25), the second coming (Matthew 24:32-24, Mark 13:28-31, Luke 21: 29-31) and the salvation of Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10).

In these passages, the fig trees provide the reader with significant insight into the author’s intended meaning. The synoptic gospel writers’ utilise the imagery and symbolism understood by the first Century Church to convey the writers’ message to their audience. However, due to cultural and geographical distances from the biblical era, the significance of the common fig and the sycamore fig has diminished, for the modern reader.

This study re-examines the role of these trees in the Bible and makes the case that the imagery and symbolism that is conveyed by them is relevant for the interpretation by the modern Church of the themes of Temple destruction attributed by Christ, the second coming and the advent of God’s salvation in the story of Zacchaeus.

Consequently, in this research I found that the common fig tree provides tangible and visual images of the themes of Temple destruction and the second coming. The common fig effectively summarises the religious state of Israel at the time of Christ and advises the believer to be vigilant and ready for Christ’s return. In addition, the sycamore fig provides a depth of understanding in the three-fold encounter between the crowd, Zacchaeus and Christ.

However, the imagery and symbolism of these trees are not widely acknowledged. The surveyed clergy’s low response is indicative of limited interaction with these themes. This study suggests this imagery is underutilised by the Church and in its interpretation of the Bible. In addition, this research makes the case that the symbolism conveyed by the fig trees is valuable for the modern Church in its ministry.

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