

Matthew 24:32-35

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2432-35/>

Jesus begins His answer to the disciples' first question, "When will these things happen?" He shares the parable of the fig tree as a way to say: pay attention to the signs and seasons so that you will be ready when the day is near. Jesus promises that this generation that sees the signs will not pass away until these things occur. Heaven and Earth will literally pass away, but Jesus's words will endure forever.

The parallel gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:28-31 and Luke 21:29-33.

In this part of Jesus's Olivet Discourse, He begins to answer the disciples' first question which was "When will these things happen?" (Matthew 24:3).

This discourse first began after the disciples asked Jesus three questions regarding future events while He sat on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem. Their questions were:

1. When will these things happen?
2. What will be the sign of your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Jesus answered these questions in reverse order. Previously, Jesus answered the disciples' third and second questions.

Initially their first question was raised in response to Jesus's startling statement that "not one stone [of Jerusalem's temple] will be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Matthew 24:2). But the disciples also seem to associate this cataclysmic event with the Messiah's return and the end of the age. Their association of these three things is seen by their asking the second two questions.

Jesus told them that they would not need a sign to know He has come because it will be inescapably apparent to everyone who He is (Matthew 24:27). But He also gave His disciple three events that would serve as precursors indicating His return was imminent. These signs were the Abomination of Desolation described in the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15); the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21); and the Darkening of the Heavens (Matthew 24:29). This was His answer to their second question. Jesus also stated that the end would not come until "This gospel of the kingdom [is] preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations" (Matthew 24:14).

By the time Jesus gets to answering their first question about "When will these things happen?" He no longer appears to be only talking about the destruction of the temple. Instead, He seems to have naturally broadened "these things" to include all that He has previously said about the end of the age and His coming, which the disciples also apparently assumed would be linked with the destruction of the temple. In summary, over the course of the conversation the scope of the first

question has widened from only talking about when the temple will be destroyed to talking about the timing of Christ's coming as well as the end of the age occurring.

Jesus began to answer their first question about when the end of the age would occur with a short parable:

Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

The changing of a *tree's leaves* is nature's way to indicate a change in season is approaching. Jesus used *the fig tree* as His example. He possibly used *the fig tree* because He was sitting on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3) where *fig trees* were present. Jesus cursed a *fig tree* near this very spot a few days earlier on His way into Jerusalem for not having any fruit despite being in leaf (Matthew 21:19). And the nearby village of Bethphage means "house of the unripe fig" indicating that *fig trees* were abundant in this area. *The fig tree* also undergoes several obvious leaf cycles throughout the year.

Because it was Passover (early/mid spring), a *fig tree's branches* were either *already tender* and putting *forth its leaves* or about to do so. *Tender branches* mean new growth. This takes place during the increasing warmth of spring. Everyone who saw *tender branches* in *the fig tree* would instantly recognize and *know that summer*, though not yet here, *is near*.

Using this visible and simple example of approaching change from nature, Jesus told His disciples, *so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near*.

The phrase *all these things* especially refers to the three signs Jesus said would precede His coming—the Abomination of Desolation, the Great Tribulation, and the Darkening of the Sky. *All these things* could also include the increase of birth pangs (the increase of wars and natural disasters—Matthew 24:7; persecutions—Matthew 24:9-10; and lawlessness—Matthew 24:12).

Jesus wanted to His disciples to *know* that the Messiah's coming was *near* when they saw these events just as easily as they knew *summer* was *near* when they noticed the *tender branches* and new *leaves* on a *fig tree*.

For emphasis, Jesus added the expression, *right at the door*. This indicated that *all these things* would practically occur the instant before *He* appeared.

Assuring the disciples with His personal divine authority, Jesus said, *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*.

There are two ways to take this prediction. One is that the generation in which the prophecy was spoken will see it fulfilled. That is implausible for a couple reasons. First, Jesus said nothing has ever happened like it, nor ever will (Matthew 24:21). Many horrendous things occurred during the forty years after Jesus said this, but it is hard to say they were the worst ever. Further, Jesus said "*of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*" (Matthew 24:36). This statement seems at odds with an interpretation that this

prophecy's fulfillment must occur within forty years. Also, it is likely that few people actually heard this prophecy during the first generation. Christianity spread, but was still a small fraction of people by the end of the first generation after Jesus.

What Jesus likely meant by *this generation* is the *generation* who sees these signs. The generation who sees the signs will also be a generation who has had the gospel of the kingdom preached to them (Matthew 24:14). So it will also likely be the first generation who has fully heard the prophecy.

The *generation* that sees the signs *will not pass away until* Christ returns, and the *end of the age* shall come. As Jesus said about the signs, when a fig tree branch *has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.* Those who see *these* signs will know that their *generation will not pass away* before all is fulfilled. Until then, the timing is unknowable.

Jesus then said *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.* Given who Jesus was (God, the Maker and Ruler of *Heaven and earth*); and what *He* was predicting (the end of *Heaven and earth*) this was a fitting statement.

“The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”
(Isaiah 40:8)

God's word is more enduring than anything we can see (Isaiah 55:11).

Jesus continues His response to the disciples' question, “When will these things be?” in the next section.

Biblical Text

³² “Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; ³³ so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, *right at the door.* ³⁴ Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.