

*"He spake also this parable – A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard Behold these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."*

This parable is interesting because it challenges the reader to consider the change of mind of the owner of the vineyard. He is caused to reconsider and is persuaded by the gardener to alter the timescale of destruction. Often when we read of such parables the Lord of the vineyard is understood to be God or perhaps His Son Jesus, and they preside over the difficulties which arise. Here the situation is of a more human representation with the limitations of those under condemnation, reflected by the change of mind. God is not a man that He should repent. He does not need to be the one who is persuaded to be merciful and to give increased time to those underperforming in order for them to be able to manifest a turnaround. How then is it that God can represent the certain man? God can appear to be stern and intractable, but that appearance is not always accurate. Jonah got angry with God because God repented of the destruction of Nineveh and made him look like someone who had failed in his prophecy! God does not repent as a man repents, but He does repent when He has seen enough response to permit Him to have a good reason to alter the outcome of what He had threatened to bring about.

The aspects of horticulture might have an influence here. Does a fig tree normally thrive in the midst of a vineyard? Not sure of the acidity of the ground which suits these two different plants. A fig tree does grow might taller than a vine and the shade under its thick leaves is heavy. The idea seems to be of a hoped-for harvest beyond the usual expectation which struggles to be fruitful. What does this represent? A standard study guide says "Unprofitableness under grace, with special reference to the Jewish nation?" How accurate is this suggestion?

It is unique to the gospel of Luke, it is not found in any other gospel record. There is a possible link with something that happened to Jesus later which was in effect a living parable. In Matthew 21v18-21 and Mark 11v13,14 Jesus cursed a barren fig tree because it had only leaves, and no fruit despite it being the correct season for such a bounty. Here there was no extension to the period of inspection and latitude for change but only an immediate response to an unsatisfactory position.

The way to more fully analysis a parable is to set out the components and to seek understanding through the correct designation of each.

A certain man

God

The owner, the possessor of the vineyard, who has the authority over it.

The fig tree

The symbol of Israel, Joel 1v7

The special nation of God, which is distinct and unique amongst other plants.

The vineyard

All the gentile nations

