

TWO BASKETS OF FIGS

PART 2: THE EVIL FIGS

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In Jeremiah 24:1-3, the Lord showed the prophet Jeremiah two baskets of figs, one with good figs, the other with rotten ones. The good figs were the Israelites sent to Babylon, who were destined to repent and return to the land (Jer 24:4-7). Having studied some important lessons concerning that first basket, we will now turn our attention to the Lord's teachings about the second basket of figs, the ones too bad to be eaten.

The basket of evil figs

The rotten figs in the second basket were the Israelites whom the Lord had *not* sent into captivity in Babylon. At the time these events were unfolding, it would have probably seemed like the Israelites who went to Babylon were the ones being punished, while the ones who were still in Jerusalem and the land of Israel were being blessed by God. In fact, the opposite was true. The "good figs" in Babylon were there for their good (Jer 24:5), while the ones who avoided captivity had something far worse in store for them. They were going to be removed from the land *for their hurt*, and would be consumed by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence (Jeremiah 24:8-10). In short, the evil figs were the remnant of the people of Israel left in Jerusalem after their brethren were taken into captivity to Babylon. They were ruled by the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, for 11 years until 586 B.C., when the city, walls, and temple were destroyed and burned by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:17-25:11; Jer 52). God was planning their utter destruction via the sword, famine, and pestilence.

Why God could no longer work with them

Concerning the people who had not gone into captivity, God said, "Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil" (Jer 29:16-17). God would do this to them "*because they have not hearkened to my words*, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord" (Jer 24:19). God had already made effort after effort to turn these people to Him, but they would not listen. They committed all the abominations of their wicked Gentile neighbors, polluted God's temple, mocked and abused the prophets, "till there was no remedy," and then were destroyed (2 Chr 36:14-17). While in Babylon with the captives (the good figs), God showed the prophet Ezekiel what their brethren back in Jerusalem were busy doing. They

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PART 2: THE EVIL FIGS (continued)

were using God's altar to worship idols, their elders were burning incense to images on the walls of the temple, their women were weeping in their service to the Sumerian god Tammuz, and others were worshiping the sun when it arose in the east (Ezek 8:5-18). With no fear of Jehovah, the people said, "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth" (Ezek 8:12). These people would be shown no mercy, and when they met their destruction, God said, "Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, *and I will be comforted*" (Ezek 5:11-13). Not only would *God* be comforted, but so would the captives in Babylon. The Lord was going to spare a remnant of these evil figs and send them to Babylon after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. While lamenting this catastrophe, the Israelites in Babylon would feel better about it when they received this reminder of just how rotten those figs were (Ezek 14:21-23).

A point of no return

It is certainly possible for people to sink so far in their wickedness and reject so many opportunities given by God to repent that they become beyond recovery. The evil figs had reached such a state. Pharaoh was described as one of these "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:17-22). Christians are warned against drifting so far away from God that they no longer maintain a basic will to serve Him anymore. At the point when the sins become "willful," the Lord says that "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb 10:26-27). At that time, it becomes impossible for such a one to be renewed again to repentance (Heb 6:4-6). If God destroyed those evil figs who despised the law of Moses, how much worse is it to turn against Christ and reject his teachings (see Heb 10:28-31)? Romans 11:22 says, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." We need to have the right kind of sorrow for whatever wrongdoing we may be guilty of. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor 7:10). The difference between those two sorrows represents the ultimate difference between the two baskets of figs.