

I SAW THEE UNDER THE FIG TREE

John 1:50 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.*

John 1:51 *And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

The fig tree has two main connotations for Jews: it represents a reminder of the nation's spiritual nakedness without salvation and, secondly, the promise of the coming Messiah who will usher in peace and salvation. Let us begin with the first one. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7). We do not know the species of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but we know that the first humans sought to hide their shame with the leaves of the fig tree. Jews have a long tradition of praying under fig trees, and Nathaniel most probably was praying under a fig tree when Philip approached him. We are not told what he was praying for but Jesus said, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John 1:48). Perhaps Nathanael prayed for the salvation of Israel and the world. It was no coincidence the Lord directed Philip to the fig tree. Saints of God in Europe, we must spend more time under the fig tree praying for the salvation of Europe. Jesus will see us – he will be moved by our tears and send a Philip to us. The fig tree leaves were not and could not be permanent, but at least it was a temporary solution to a desperate situation.

Gal 3:27 *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

The humble fig tree does not pretend to have salvation, but clothes us temporarily while we wait for the Lord Jesus to clothe us permanently with his own body in baptism in his name. From the fig tree, Nathanael met Jesus and was baptized in Jesus' name. It was under the fig tree that Nathanael heard about Jesus for the first time in his life. If you do not know about Jesus' salvation, you are sitting right now under the fig tree. We are God's Philips who speak to you about salvation in Jesus' name. The theme of the encounter between the Lord Jesus and Nathanael was actually Jacob's experience in Bethel because the Lord told him, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). However, prior to this, the Lord said of Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). Following the theme of Jacob's ladder, the Lord was probably comparing the character of Jacob and Nathanael – Jacob was full of guile

while Nathanael had no guile. God had changed the character of Jacob and made him Israel. The Lord now compares the character of Nathanael to Israel. Nevertheless, whether one is with or without guile, revelation can only come through the sovereign intervention of God alone. Jacob had no idea that God was in Bethel and Nathanael had no idea that God was in the Galilee. Both men loved God and were in spiritual turmoil, but only God could reach them. Thankfully, God sees those who love him and pray under the fig tree. He is Jehovah roi, the God who sees.

John 1:45 *Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*
John 1:46 *And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.*

Philip's witness was not the most convincing – he could have said that Jesus is from Bethlehem and of Judah, but he said Nazareth and “the son of Joseph”. Perhaps Nathanael did not know that the Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judah, as the prophecy of Micah declares. Have you experienced a moment in your Christian witness when you said something about the Lord that you later regretted? I have experienced such moments when I later cried and begged the Lord for forgiveness for not giving a more forceful and persuasive witness. Thankfully, our errors or lack of knowledge in witnessing are corrected and superseded by Jesus's Spirit who draws all men unto him. To his credit, Nathaniel was still willing to see Jesus although he made his prejudice clear. Nathaniel impresses us with his quick and decisive faith. “Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49). Indeed, Nathaniel saw heaven open many times and testify about Jesus.

Let us come to the second part of the message about the fig tree: the promise of the coming Messiah who will usher in peace and salvation. Theodor Herzl who is considered the “father of the state of Israel”, once mentioned the scripture in Micah as the dream and justification for establishing the state of Israel. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it” (Micah 4:4). It was perhaps this dream and longing that drove Nathanael to sit under the fig tree and pray for the coming of the Messiah who alone would fulfill this prophecy. We also today sit under this fig tree together with Nathanael and pray for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even the Lord himself referred to the fig tree as symbolic of his own return. “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth

leaves, ye know that summer is nigh” (Matthew 24:32). May I remind yet again of the signs that point, like the fig tree, to the approaching return of the Jesus!

Dan 12:4 *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

Luke 17:26 *And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.*

Luke 17:27 *They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.*

Luke 17:28 *Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;*

Mat 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

Rev 13:17 *And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

Each of these prophecies would require an entire sermon but allow me to draw your attention to one prophecy that we are perhaps just beginning to discern the contours of.

Rev 13:15 *And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.*

Stephen Hawking, one of the world’s greatest scientists, once told the BBC, “The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.”¹ The leading textbooks on artificial intelligence define it as simply as the intelligence demonstrated by machines. Can machines have an intelligence independent of humans? Do machines perceive their environments? Are they capable of defining and achieving their goals? “Google,” is actually a misspelling of the Latin term “googol,” which means 10¹⁰⁰ (10 to the 100th power). The boast was that the search engine could search for and consolidate all the knowledge in existence. In one sense the boast is to be able to become omniscient (all-knowing) and hence God-like. On the 22nd of July this month (2022), Google fired one of its researchers, Blake Lemoine, because he publicly declared that one of Google’s AI project’s LaMDA – short for *Language Model for Dialogue Applications* – was sentient (feelings, emotions) and has questioned whether it had a soul. He said, “I legitimately believe that LaMDA is a person.”² Could it be that this researcher witnessed the beginning of what will happen when the antichrist reigns during the tribulation? Machines cannot have feelings or

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-30290540>

² <https://www.engadget.com/blake-lemoine-fired-google-lamda-sentient-001746197.html>

intelligence unless demons enter into and use them to control humans. This antichrist gives “life” unto an image of himself. Only God can give life, so how does the antichrist do this? Obviously through possession of machines, such as the internet. Nearly every human being on this planet is glued to some machine at this moment – either a smartphone, a laptop or some screen. Imagine the effect when the antichrist’s spirit begins to speak through these machines and kill anyone who resists worshipping the beast! Fortunately, we who sit under the fig tree are not awaiting the return of the antichrist but the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Titus 2:12** Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

***Titus 2:13** Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

May the Lord Jesus find us sitting under the fig tree when he returns!