XIX. THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE

The only miracle which Jesus is said to have performed at Jerusalem, and at the same time the only one which may be called a "punitive miracle," is described in Mt. 21:18-22 and Mk. 11:12-14; 20-24.

The texts are not identical in wording. The timetable in Matthew differs from Mark's. In Matthew it is as follows: First day: entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), cleansing of the temple (21:12-17), departure from the city for Bethany (21:17). Second day: cursing and withering of the fig tree (21:18-20). Jesus' teaching (21:21-22).

In Mark the timetable extends over three days:
First day: entry into Jerusalem (11:1-10); visit to the temple and return to Bethany (11:11).
Second day: cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14); cleansing of the temple (11:15-19).
Third day: the discovery that the fig tree had withered (11:20-21), Jesus' teaching (11:22-26). ¹

Mt. 21:19 does not contain the words present in Mk. 11:13: "if haply he might find anything thereon" or "for the time of figs was not yet." The curse in Matthew is: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever;" in Mark it is: "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever."

In Matthew the text continues as follows after the cursing: "And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!," verses 19, 20. Mark states that the disciples "heard" Jesus curse the fig tree, 11:14, and this concludes the first part of the account. He goes on to say how the temple was cleansed, verses 15-18, this account being concluded by: "And when even was come, he went

out of the city," verse 19. Then Mark takes up the thread of the fig tree story again. "And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away," verses 20, 21. We note a considerable difference between the short, matter-of-fact account in Mt. 21:19: "and presently the fig tree withered away" and the careful statement that the withering was "from the roots," Mk. 11:20. According to Matthew it was the disciples who asked Jesus, whilst according to Mark Peter "called to remembrance" Jesus' cursing of the tree.

After this list of the striking differences — we shall leave out of consideration the problems associated with the questions of priority, adaptation of the account (abridgment or expansion?) and possible influences in the adaptation (the separate mention of Peter's name), etc. — we shall make a number of exegetic comments.

The place where Jesus and His disciples spent the night was Bethany, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. 1 Both Matthew and Mark mention that Jesus was hungry. Had Jesus spent the night in prayer, so that He was hungry? However this may be, on the way to Jerusalem He saw a fig tree by the side of the road — Mark adds "afar off" — and went to it: "if haply he might find any thing thereon."

For the tree was in leaf, but did this justify the thought that the tree would be bearing edible fruit at this time around Passover? DALMAN states that the fig tree is still very much at home today on the warm eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. It might be assumed that the fruit was developing satisfactorily, but, says DALMAN, "it is out of the question that the figs were ripe around Passover. For in April there are only undeveloped figs, many of which fall off, or at best fully developed ones, which are, however, without juice, and are nothing like the ripe, juicy 'early figs,' which cannot be expected until June, let alone the real, less juicy 'figs' of the main harvest, which become ripe on the year's new shoots in August."

As it was not the season for figs, Mk. 11:13 can only mean "that the full foliage of the tree at a most unusually early time rightly promised something out of the ordinary with regard to the fruit, too. If the fruit lacked vegetative force, the tree was rank and offered no pros-


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