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**FIGS**

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)

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The [Talmud](orallaw.html) tells us that [*Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*](knowledge.html) (in the Garden of [Eden](eden.html)) was a fig tree:

***Berachoth 40a*** *... OVER FRUIT OF THE GROUND etc. This is obvious, is it not? — R. Nahman b.* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *said: It required to be stated in view of the opinion of R. Judah, who maintains that wheat is a kind of tree. For it has been* [*taught*](teacher.html)*: R. Meir holds that the tree of which* [*Adam*](adam.html)[*ate*](eating.html) *was the vine, since the thing that most causes* [*wailing*](mashal.html) *to a man is wine, as it says, And he drank of the wine and was drunken.[[1]](#footnote-1) R. Ezra-Nechemiah (Nehemiah)-Nechemiah (Nehemiah) says it was the fig tree, so that they repaired their misdeed with the instrument of it, as it says, And they sewed fig leaves together.[[2]](#footnote-2) R. Judah says it was wheat, since a child does not* [*know*](daat.html) *how to call ‘father’ and ‘mother’ until it has had a taste of corn.[[3]](#footnote-3) Now you might think that because R. Judah says that wheat is a kind of tree, therefore we should say over it the benediction ‘who createst the fruit of the tree’. Therefore we are told that we say ‘who createst the fruit of the tree’ only in those cases where if you take away the fruit the stem still remains to produce fruit again*

Other [Talmudic](orallaw.html) references to the fig tree:

***Berachoth 57a*** *... If* [*one*](one.html) *sees a fig tree in a* [*dream*](dreams.html)*, his learning will be preserved within him, as it says: Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall* [*eat*](eating.html) *the fruit thereof.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

And:

***Eiruvin 54b*** *... R. Hiyya b. Abba in the* [*name*](name.html) *of R. Johanan expounded: With reference to the Scriptural text: Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall* [*eat*](eating.html) *the fruit thereof,[[5]](#footnote-5) why were the words of the Torah compared to the ‘fig tree’? As with the fig tree[[6]](#footnote-6)the more* [*one*](one.html)*[[7]](#footnote-7) searches it the more figs* [*one*](one.html) *finds in it so it is with the words of the Torah; the more* [*one*](one.html) *studies them the more relish he finds in them.*

Bethphage, the [name](name.html) means "House of Unripe Figs", was often mentioned in the Scriptures. Understanding the meaning of Bethphage is the key to understanding the importance of this [city](city.html).

Bethphage was understood to be the [city](city.html) where the [Kohanim](priests.html) ([Priests](priests.html)) lived, who took care of the "[clean](purity.html) place" on the top of the [Mount of Olives](east.html). They lived in this [city](city.html) because if the figs were unripe then there was no chance of repeating [Adam's](adam.html) [sin](sin.html). The [name](name.html) was used to picture righteousness.

Lets look at where Bethphage is used:

***Matityahu (Matthew) 21:1-11*** *As they approached* [*Jerusalem*](city.html) *and came to Bethphage on the* [*Mount of Olives*](east.html)*,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *sent* [*two*](two.html) *disciples, Saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a* [*donkey*](chamor.html) *tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord* [*needs*](needs.html) *them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a* [*donkey*](chamor.html)*, on a colt, the foal of a* [*donkey*](chamor.html)*.'" The disciples went and did as* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *had instructed them. They brought the* [*donkey*](chamor.html) *and the colt, placed their* [*cloaks*](tzitzith.html) *on them, and* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and* [*spread them over the road*](tzitzith.html)*. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the* [*name*](name.html) *of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" When* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *entered* [*Jerusalem*](city.html)*, the whole* [*city*](city.html) *was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

***Marqos (Mark) 11:1-10*** *As they approached* [*Jerusalem*](city.html) *and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the* [*Mount of Olives*](east.html)*,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *sent* [*two*](two.html) *of his disciples, Saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no* [*one*](one.html) *has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord* [*needs*](needs.html) *it and will send it back here shortly.'" They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, Some people* [*standing*](mashal.html) *there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the* [*name*](name.html) *of the Lord!" "Blessed is the* [*coming*](coming.html) *kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"*

***Luqas (***[***Luke***](luke.html)***) 19:29-40*** *As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the* [*Mount of Olives*](east.html)*, he sent* [*two*](two.html) *of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no* [*one*](one.html) *has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord* [*needs*](needs.html) *it.'" Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord* [*needs*](needs.html) *it." They brought it to* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, threw their cloaks on the colt and put* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the* [*Mount of Olives*](east.html)*, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the* [*name*](name.html) *of the Lord!" "Peace in* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, "*[*Teacher*](teacher.html)*, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will* [*cry*](mashal.html) *out."*

There was another [city](city.html) closely associated with Bethphage. This [city](city.html) was also called after the fig. **Bethany** was the *House of [Ripe] Figs*.

***Matityahu (Matthew) 21:17-22*** *And he left them and went out of the* [*city*](city.html) *to Bethany, where he spent the night. Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the* [*city*](city.html)*, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in* [*prayer*](prayer.html)*."*

***Matityahu (Matthew) 26:6-13*** *While* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *was in Bethany in the home of a man* [*known*](daat.html) *as Simon the Leper, A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his* [*head*](body.html) *as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on* [*my body*](body.html)*, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this* [*gospel*](mishna1.html) *is preached throughout the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

***Marqos (Mark) 11:11-14***[*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *entered* [*Jerusalem*](city.html) *and went to the* [*temple*](temple.html)*. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the* [*Twelve*](twelve.html)*. The next day as they were leaving Bethany,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no* [*one*](one.html) *ever* [*eat*](eating.html) *fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.*

***Eiruvin 54a-b*** *How are words of Torah like a fig tree? [As everyone knows, a fig tree’s fruit ripens at various times over a long season;] whenever you search the tree, you can find figs ready to* [*eat*](eating.html)*. So also with words of Torah: whenever you are engaged in studying them, you will find morsels of wisdom.*

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Numbers***](nchart.html) ***XII:9*** *Why was the Torah likened to a fig-tree? Because most trees-the olive, the vine, the date-are picked all at once, while the fig-tree is picked little by little. It is the same with the Torah.* [*One*](one.html) *learns a little of it* [*one*](one.html) *day and more the next; for it cannot be learned all in* [*one*](one.html) *year or in* [*two*](two.html)*.*

Some see the cursing of the fig tree as a curse on the [*Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*](knowledge.html), especially considering that this tree was close to Bethany, the House of Ripe Figs.

***Marqos (Mark) 14:3-9*** *While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man* [*known*](daat.html) *as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his* [*head*](body.html)*. Some of those present were saying indignantly to* [*one*](one.html) *another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any* [*time*](time.html) *you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my* [*body*](body.html) *beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the* [*gospel*](mishna1.html) *is preached throughout the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

The anointing of [Mashiach](mashiach.html), [Messiah](mashiach.html), at Bethany, the House of Ripe Figs, may allude to the reason why He had to die: Because [Adam](adam.html) [ate](eating.html) of the *Tree of the* [*Knowledge*](knowledge.html) *of Good and Evil*.

***Luqas (***[***Luke***](luke.html)***) 24:50-53*** *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his* [*hands*](fourteen.html) *and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*. Then they worshiped him and returned to* [*Jerusalem*](city.html) *with great joy. And they stayed continually at the* [*temple*](temple.html)*, praising God.*

***Yochanan (John) 11:1-45*** *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same* [*one*](one.html) *who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his* [*feet*](heel.html) *with her* [*hair*](hair.html)*. So the sisters sent word to* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, "Lord, the* [*one*](one.html) *you love is sick." When he heard this,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was* [*two*](two.html) *more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *answered, "Are there not* [*twelve*](twelve.html) *hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this* [*world's*](worlds.html) *light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen* [*asleep*](mashal.html)*; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he* [*sleeps*](mashal.html)*, he will get better."* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *had been* [*speaking*](mashal.html) *of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural* [*sleep*](mashal.html)*. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." On his arrival,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for* [*four*](four.html) *days. Bethany was less than* [*two*](two.html) *miles from* [*Jerusalem*](city.html)*, And many* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *was* [*coming*](coming.html)*, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I* [*know*](daat.html) *that even now God will give you whatever you ask."* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I* [*know*](daat.html) *he will rise again in the* [*resurrection*](techiyat.html) *at the last day."* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said to her, "I am the* [*resurrection*](techiyat.html) *and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the* [*Mashiach*](mashiach.html)*, the Son of God, who was to come into the* [*world*](worlds.html)*." And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The* [*Teacher*](teacher.html) *is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to* [*mourn*](mourning.html) *there. When Mary reached the place where* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *was and saw him, she fell at his* [*feet*](heel.html) *and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *saw her* [*weeping*](mashal.html)*, and the* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *who had come along with her also* [*weeping*](mashal.html)*, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)[*wept*](mashal.html)*. Then the* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the* [*eyes*](body.html) *of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this* [*time*](time.html) *there is a bad odor, for he has been there* [*four*](four.html) *days." Then* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I* [*knew*](daat.html) *that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people* [*standing*](mashal.html) *here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his* [*hands*](fourteen.html) *and* [*feet*](heel.html) *wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his* [*face*](body.html)*.* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *did, put their faith in him.*

So, [Mashiach](mashiach.html) hears that Lazarus is sick and He waits [two](two.html) more days, even as [Adam](adam.html) (man) was "sick unto death" for [two](two.html) [millennia](millenium.html) before the "cure of Torah" began [coming](coming.html) to man ([Abraham](avraham.html)'s obedience was the beginning of Torah). Lazarus was dead for [four](four.html) days, after those [first](one.html) [two](two.html) days, even as man has been "dead in his [sins](sin.html)" for a total of [six](six.html) [millennia](millenium.html). Even as Lazarus was raised on the [sixth](six.html) day, so also will mankind be raised at the end of [six](six.html) [millennia](millenium.html).

The raising of Lazerus may very well picture the [resurrection of the righteous](techiyat.html). A close reading seems to indicate that it took place after [six](six.html) days, even as the righteous expect to be resurrected after the [sixth](six.html) [millennium](millenium.html). The fact that it took place in Bethany, the house of ripe figs, may allude to the reason that he died: He partook of [Adam](adam.html)'s [sin](sin.html) who [ate](eating.html) of the "fig" of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil](knowledge.html).

***Yochanan (John) 12:1-8***[*Six*](six.html) *days before the* [*Passover*](passover.html)*,* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*'* [*feet*](heel.html) *and wiped his* [*feet*](heel.html) *with her* [*hair*](hair.html)*. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But* [*one*](one.html) *of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone,"* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *replied." [It was intended] that she should* [*save*](salvation.html) *this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

**Fig Leaves and Fires**

For fueling the [fire](fire.html) upon the altar from which coals would be taken for the [offering](korbanot) of the [incense](ketoret.html) (and for all the fires upon the altar) it was customary to take wood which came from a fig tree.

The fig tree referred to here must be [one](one.html) that grows wild and bears no edible fruit. Otherwise, it would be disqualified for use in the same way that the [Mishna](orallaw.html) in the second perek of Mesechta Tamid disqualifies the wood of all fruit-bearing trees, by citing the examples of grape and olive trees. The reason given for this by Rabbi Acha bar [Yaakov](israelja.html) is to preserve the settlement of [Eretz Yisrael](city.html) for if there will be no wine or oil or figs to enjoy the land may become desolate.

But why did they insist on the fig tree?

Rashi explains that the leaves of the fig tree were the [first](one.html) items of plant life to be used in human effort for self improvement. When [Adam](adam.html) became conscious of his nakedness following his sinful [eating](eating.html) from the *Tree of the* [*Knowledge*](knowledge.html) *of Good and Evil* he fashioned some garments for himself and his wife from fig leaves (Bereishis 3:7). It is therefore fitting that the wood from this tree be given priority in the effort of [Adam](adam.html)'s descendants to achieve self-improvement through the service of the [Beit HaMikdash](mikdash.html). **Zevachim 58a**

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1. Gen. IX, 21. The reference is to Noah. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. III, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hence the Tree of Knowledge must have been some kind of corn. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Prov. XXVII, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Prov. XXVII, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Since all its fruit does ripen at the same time. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lit., ‘all the time that a man’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)