

## News Story Summary

The citrus industry in Florida is suffering and is threatened with destruction if scientists can't find a way to stop the Asian citrus psyllid, a tiny winged insect, from spreading a tree-killing disease. The disease is commonly known as citrus greening and was first discovered in Florida in 1998. The psyllid feeds on the sap of tree leaves and, thus, infects the tree with the bacterium. The bacterium blocks the passage of nutrients through the tree, which produces leaves that have yellowing veins, yellow-green mottling, and sometimes no green coloring at all. The yellowing spreads throughout the tree over a year and causes oranges to drop prematurely, contain aborted seeds, be deformed, and have a bitter taste. Root systems are often poorly developed as well. Infected trees get a "death sentence" once their sap is poisoned.

The current harvest shrank to an estimated 74 million boxes, down 24% from a year ago. Prices for citrus fruit, juice, and concentrate are rising at rapid rates.

One drawback to aggressive treatment is that if someone makes this effort but his neighbor does not, he constantly gets new insects coming from neighboring groves. Scientists are frantically looking for a solution and pursuing all possible options. They are testing thermotherapy, antibiotics, and wasps that eat the psyllids.

(For more on this story, search the Internet using the term "Florida citrus threatened by greening.")

## Focus Attention

Invite the group to listen as you share the story above. Ask them to take note of what happens to the trees that produce bad fruit. Ask: *What options do you see for the farmers? What choices do they have?*

Explain that today's lesson is about the fact that we have a choice in life to follow Christ and live for Him or to pursue the sins of this world. Today's passage uses several analogies to make this point clear: a narrow gate vs. a broad road, a house built on a rock vs. a house built on sand, and a tree that produces good fruit vs. one that produces bad fruit. Encourage the group to consider the choice they have as they study today.

## Challenge

Remind the group of the story about the insects impacting Florida citrus. Highlight the fact that some farmers are seeking to eradicate the insect while others are choosing to ignore the insect. Lead the group to discuss the danger of ignoring the insect. Ask: *What are the dangers of us ignoring the impact of sin in our own lives?*

Encourage the group to evaluate their own lives to see which path they have taken. Let them know that, if they have chosen the wrong path, it is not too late to change direction. They can make that choice through prayer today.

Also encourage the group to think about how they can be a positive influence upon those around them, to help counteract the worldly culture which surrounds us all and can cause us to be infected with the disease of sin.