



## Mark 12:1-12

### The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

<sup>1</sup>And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.<sup>2</sup> When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.<sup>3</sup> And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.<sup>4</sup> Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.<sup>5</sup> And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.<sup>6</sup> He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’<sup>7</sup> But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’<sup>8</sup> And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.<sup>9</sup> What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.<sup>10</sup> Have you not read this Scripture:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;<sup>11</sup> this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”

<sup>12</sup>And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away. (ESV)

#### I. A WORD ABOUT PARABLES

- A. Simple Definition:** “a parable is an ingeniously simple word picture illuminating a profound spiritual lesson.”
- B. Parable & Allegory** (from Akpunonu’s *The Vine, Israel, and the Church*)
1. A parable therefore is an extended metaphor, frequently becoming a brief narrative, for didactic purposes. An allegory on the other hand is an extension of a simile, often in a narrative form but since each term or concept has its peculiar meaning; one ignores the literal meaning to discover new and hidden meanings in each term used.
  2. A parable presents one single point of comparison and the details are not intended to have independent significances, while with the allegory, each detail is a metaphor and each detail has a meaning on its own right.

#### II. A NECESSARY REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS VERSES

- A. By Whose Authority?** The passage of the “The Wicked Vinedressers” is actually a continuation of the previous passage where Yeshua’s authority is being questioned. The question that’s being posed is “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” This is the question that hinges these passages together which in turn leads Yeshua to speak to them (the chief priests and the scribes and the elders) in parables. In order to get the full impact of what is being said here, we need to go back further into the passage to at least the cursing of the fig tree and probably as far back as Mark Chapter 1, the baptism of Yeshua.
- B. The Cursing of the Fig Tree:** What we have here is an object lesson for the disciples. Yeshua and the disciples were in Bethany; Yeshua was hungry and spotted a leafy fig tree in the distance. They came upon it to find that the tree didn’t have any fruit since it was not the season for figs. Yeshua cursed the fig tree and said “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And His disciples heard it. If you remember, Mark likes to sandwich passages together. Here, we have a Markan sandwich: on the outside we have the cursing of the fig tree and the lesson from the withered fig tree as outside portions of the sandwich; on the inside we have the cleansing of the Temple. The cursing of the fig tree is called an enacted or acted parable which demonstrates what is to follow in the next passage in the cleansing of the Temple.
- C. The Purification of the Temple was Prophetic:** “The purification of the temple was the duty of the Messiah (Mal 3:1–4); by that very act, Jesus claimed for himself both the title and the office of the Messiah. This the Jewish leaders resented (Akpunonu).

1. Exclusion or Inclusion? In the cleansing of the Temple, Yeshua “drove out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers” then He was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” I have read commentators who believe that Yeshua was simply upset because of the money being exchanged in the outer court where preparation in pray should have been taking place. This was not the main reason for Yeshua’s scorn—if you remember Brad’s picture of the Temple, it showed the outer court for the women and the Gentiles and the inner court for the priests—this demonstrates an aspect of exclusion. What did GOD commission Israel to do? Israel’s mission was to bring Light to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6), which meant inclusion. Was Israel successful in this? No.
  2. The Light of the World? Part of Jesus’ charge against his fellow-Jews was that Israel as a whole had used its vocation, to be the light of the world, as an excuse for a hard, narrow, nationalist piety and politics in which the rest of the world was to be, not enlightened, but condemned. The Temple had been intended to symbolize God’s dwelling with Israel for the sake of the world; the way Jesus’ contemporaries had organized things, it had come to symbolize not God’s welcome to the nations but God’s exclusion of them. The guardians of the Temple itself were notorious for their rich and oppressive lifestyle; violence towards outsiders; injustice towards Israel itself—that was what the Temple had come to mean. As with the fig tree, Jesus’ only word for the place was one of judgment (Wright).
  3. Coming Judgment: This is about God’s long suffering over his rocky relationship with his people Israel; this was about impending judgment for the Temple and the leadership of Israel because of their iniquities. From the outside Israel appeared to be very religious, they were commissioned by God to be light to the nations, they had God’s word, and they even had the sepulchers of the prophets to prove it. But just as the leafy fig tree appeared to have great promise of fruit as Israel did, we find this all to be a facade; once the leaves are lifted we find no fruit.
  4. Barren Israel: Israel was barren and they were also pretentious and false, the searching eye of our Lord found no fruit upon this tree beneath the leaves—no true soul-controlling belief even in the promises of the Messiah, of which they made so much—no true sense of their obligation and of their incapacity to please God. The tree by the roadside was a visible symbol of the moral condition of Israel as it presented ‘itself to the eye of Christ, and there was no longer any reason for suspending the judgment which had been foretold in the Savior’s parable: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” (Liddon).
- D. Yeshua’s Authority Questioned:** “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” This is the hinge point that leads into Mark 12:1-12, remember Yeshua had just cleansed the temple, he had just infringed himself upon the high priests, elders and scribes’ authority, and they were feeling violated.
1. “By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” (Matt 21:23). It was in response to this question that Jesus told them three parables:
    - The parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28–32)
    - The parable of the wicked husbandmen (Vinedressers) (Matt 21:33–44)
    - The parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:1–14)
  2. All these parables teach the same lessons:
    - The call of the Jewish people
    - Their inability—especially of their leaders—to respond to the call to obedience and piety
    - The call of the “others.” (Akpunonu)

### III. THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS

**A. A Continued Response to Challenging His Authority:** Jesus’ allegory of the wicked tenants continues his response to the leaders’ challenge of his authority (11:27–33) and brings matters to a head. Like the allegory of the sower in 4:1–9, it drives the plot forward and prepares the reader for what follows. What happens to Jesus should come as no surprise, given the leaders’ hostility. But the allegory allows us to see these events from the perspective of God’s long and turbulent relationship with Israel.

1. The allegory resembles the clever trap Nathan set for David with his story of the ewe lamb (2 Sam. 12:1–15) (Garland)
    - a. As Garland opens his depiction of the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, he starts by taking us to the end of the passage. If you remember what was said in 2 Sam. 12:1-15 and Mark 12:12, then you will see the connection and understand the cleverness of Nathan and Yeshua.
    - b. Nathan caught David in his web of adultery, murder, and lies with his stern, “You are the man!” Jesus catches the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders in a similar trap. They were the major landlords in Israel and should naturally sympathize with the plight of the owner in the story. A story about willful and murderous tenants would raise the ire (anger) of any landholder—until they realize that Jesus’ allegory targets them. They are the vile, incorrigible, deadbeat tenants of God’s vineyard. It mirrors the real-life story of their rejection of God’s prophets, such as John the Baptizer, and their venomous plotting against God’s Son. Like David, they know their guilt—“they knew he had spoken the parable against them” (12:12). Unlike David, they do not repent when confronted with it (Garland).
- B. Colorful Metaphors:** Here at the beginning of the parable we see this great vineyard full of colorful metaphors and in the Hebrew scripture from Isaiah 5:2 we find clues that give us understanding and insight to this parable.
1. Isaiah 5 Context: Familiarity with Old Testament images helps one see that the figures in the allegory are transparent metaphors. The vineyard is a symbol of God’s relationship to the chosen people Israel, and the description of the building of the vineyard has striking parallels with Isaiah 5:2. Since the hedge, winepress, and tower have no significance in the later development of the story, these details are only included to recall to mind the Isaian context. In Isaiah’s allegorical love song, the care lavished by God on the vineyard contrasts with the people’s ingratitude and lack of fruitfulness (see Isa. 5:1–7; note how this passage is followed by a series of woes). The friction between the vineyard owner and the tenants may reflect the real world of absentee landlords, but the story is an allegory of God’s troubled relationship with Israel that is nearing its climax (see also 3:14; Jer. 12:10) (Garland).
- C. Components of the Parable:** Here’s the breakdown of the allegories used in the parable (verses 2-8).
1. Garland, as stated above tells us that the hedge, winepress, and tower have no significance in the later development of the story; these details are only included to recall to mind the Isaian context. American theologian Klyne Snodgrass from his book, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* states that “at times smaller details of the parable were allegorized as well. For example, the hedge around the vineyard was understood as the help of the angels, the tower as the Temple.”
  2. The Landowner: Here the **landowner**, represented God, develops the vineyard with great care, then leases it (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*).
  3. The **Vinedressers** (Tenants): representing the Jewish leaders (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*).
  4. The **Vineyard**: The vineyard is a common symbol for the Jewish nation in Scripture. Here, it symbolizes Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8-16; Is. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21) (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*).
  5. **Servants**: the messengers (servants) are the prophets.
    - a. The servants’ treatment in the allegory surely called to mind the ill-treatment of the prophets. The abuse of the servants in the allegory becomes progressively worse. The first is beaten and sent away (12:3), the next is struck on the head and treated shamefully (12:4), and the last is killed (12:5) (Garland).
  6. **The Son, his beloved**: The son represents Jesus Christ. (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*).
    - a. The tenants recognize the son as the heir and wickedly want his inheritance for themselves (see 15:10; Pilate recognizes the Pharisees’ envy of Jesus). Defiance mixed with cunning proves to be their final undoing. They become snared by their own clever plot (Job 5:13; 1 Cor. 3:19). They mistakenly assume that the owner is now dead and foolishly hope that killing the heir will give them sole ownership of the vineyard. After they assassinate the son, they throw his body outside and leave him unburied. To refuse to bury a corpse was an incredible offense in the ancient world (Garland).

7. **Others** (other vinedressers): The kingdom and all the spiritual advantages given to Israel will now be given to “other vinedressers,” symbolizing the church, which consists primarily of Gentiles (*cf. Rom. 11:11*) (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*).
- a. This is the common understanding by past and current scholarship; it is my contention that this isn’t correct. This passage is full of Jewish thought and imagery supported by the Hebrew scripture, the idea that the others (other vinedressers) would be the church, which consists primarily of Gentiles, just doesn’t fit. The assertion that the others are symbolized by the church, which consists primarily of Gentiles is driven not by scripture but by certain theologies! We find this understanding in primarily two theological camps, Dispensationalism and Supersessionism or what is commonly called replacement theology or fulfillment theology.
    - i. In Dispensationalism, God had two peoples and two programs, both of which must be kept separate and distinguished from each other. When Israel rejected their Messiah, God turned to the church and offered them His promises. However, at the time of the second coming of the Messiah, God will turn once again in his mercy as he fulfills his promise of giving them the land and fulfilling his promise that “All Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). This view rejects replacement theology (or “Supersessionism”) (Kaiser).
    - ii. In Supersessionism or what is commonly called replacement theology, the church has replaced Israel and is now the new Israel due to Israel’s failure to believe or obey the covenant God gave them, Gentiles believers now sit in Israel’s seat of privilege.
    - iii. Dispensationalism states that the church has temporarily displaced Israel until the second coming and Supersessionism states that the church is now the new Israel. So, it’s understandable to see why both of these theologies would view the others (other vinedressers) in verse 9 as symbolizing the church, which consists primarily of Gentiles. But here’s the problem, God never made a covenant with the church—you won’t find it anywhere in the Scriptures. If you go back to the Hebrew Scriptures in Jeremiah 31:31, you’ll find the New Covenant. But who did God make that covenant with? That covenant was made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not the church. This assertion that the others (other vinedressers) in verse 9 as symbolizing the church, which consists primarily of Gentiles is a puzzle piece that just doesn’t fit! Maybe the others are national Israel or maybe it might be the disciples as Pastor Peder suggests, one thing is for sure, it won’t be rebellious vinedressers.

**D. The Concluding Question** (verses 9-12) What will the vineyard owner (God represents the vineyard owner) do?

1. Nothing Done? From the reading of the passage it looks like the vineyard owner may not do anything. He appears to be weak and unresponsive to the actions of the wicked vinedressers. His servants were treated poorly, beaten and killed. His son wasn’t treated any better. He was also killed but to no avail. No action has been taken to this point.
2. God’s Action: The answer to this question is not obvious from what precedes. The owner seems to be rather ineffectual and weak. Perhaps he will do nothing because, as the tenants gambled, he is impotent and can do nothing. It helps to recognize, however, that the owner represents God in this allegory. Obviously, God is not powerless. God has shown inordinate patience, but the conclusion reveals the prophetic warning that God will not be patient forever.
3. God’s Kindness & New Vineyard Stewards: When one interprets this allegory against the backdrop of the larger story of God’s relations with Israel, one recalls the biblical axiom that God’s kindness is meant to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Isaiah records God’s warning, “All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who continually provoke me to my very face” (Isa. 65:2–3a). Continual rebellion will meet with certain judgment (65:7). But God will not destroy all Israel; a remnant will be saved (65:8–16). In Jesus’ parable the vineyard is not destroyed but given to others. Who those others are is unclear, and this ambiguity leads to the final point to be discussed in bridging the contexts (Garland).

- a. One should be careful not to interpret this allegory as explaining the rejection of Israel in favor of a Gentile Christian church. Jesus used this allegory to confront his opponents with their sin and to call them to account, not to put the people of Israel in a bad light. Jesus warns these chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders. He knows the murderous plans they have hatched in their hearts; perhaps they will repent. In Mark's context, this allegory is not about God's rejection of Israel, but about the defiance of the leaders (Garland).
- b. So, the vineyard owner will act and will destroy (bring judgment against) the tenants (Israel's leadership) and give the vineyard to others.

**E. The Cornerstone:** Yeshua concludes the question by asking a question (in verses 11 & 12)

1. *The Rock of Offense:* 1 Peter 2:8 "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
2. *The Rejected Stone:* When Peter preached to the Jewish leaders in Acts 4:8-12, he quoted Psalm 118:22 to show that Jesus is the rejected stone whom God made to be the cornerstone of salvation. They (the Jewish leaders) rejected Him, but God not only accepted Him but put Him in the position of highest honor.
3. *The Cornerstone:* Peter pressed the point home with this powerful conclusion: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). These words are utterly exclusive. There is no other hope, no other way, and no other name than the name of Jesus. If we would be saved, we must come God's way or we won't come at all.
4. *Receive Him:* Do not be like the builders who rejected God's Stone of salvation! Do not reject Jesus Christ. Do not stumble over this rejected stone. The very stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. May God open your eyes to see Jesus as he really is—the Cornerstone of eternal salvation (Pritchard).

**F. Understanding the Parable:** What's interesting about this statement is that the chief priests, scribes and elders actually understood the parable! From Yeshua's perspective, they shouldn't have understood it. If you remember Yeshua's purpose of a parable in Mark 4:11-12, And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven." So, you see they shouldn't have understood it, yet they did; why? Well, the figurative language that Yeshua used was so ingrained in Jewish imagery and thought—it was so familiar that they figured it out.

1. The text states that "they were seeking to arrest him" and some bibles say "they sought to lay hands on Him," this doesn't mean that they wanted to lay hands on Him to impart some kind blessing. No, they didn't want to just arrest Him, they wanted to do what was stirring in their hearts, they wanted to kill him.

#### IV. CLOSING POINTS

1. God's promised plan will not be thwarted.
2. Israel's disobedience does not mean that God has written off Israel.
3. Warnings from God are to heed positive action.
4. There are always consequences for our actions.
5. Repentance is key—remember, God is always ready and willing to take us back with open arms.
6. The judgment that fell on them (Israel's leadership) can fall on us if we, as leaders, fail in our stewardship.
7. We must examine the areas that we have failed to yield fruit to God.
8. Have you ever rejected and mistreated God's servants, if so what can you do to correct that short-coming?

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