

# Parable of the Vineyard and the Vine-growers

Jesus told forty-two parables during His ministry here on earth that are recorded in the gospels. Thirty-two parables are presented in only one of the gospels. Three parables were taught in two gospels, and seven parables are found in just three gospels. None of the parables are recorded in all four gospels. So when a parable of Jesus Christ is found in three gospels, that means it has great significance. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record three parables that Jesus gave in one day. The day that He gave the parables was Tuesday, March 29, A.D. 33. Our last study was about the first parable, which is titled, “Parable of Two Sons and the Vineyard — How To Go To Heaven.” Our next study will be about the third parable. This study is about Jesus’ second parable, which is the “Parable About the Vineyard and the Vine-growers.” These are the last parables given by Jesus to the members of the Sanhedrin Council on this Tuesday. They are warning parables. The parable in this study is found in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; and Luke 20:9-19. It is different then the “Parable of the Landowner and Vineyard.”

**Landowner Rented His Vineyard.** This parable is about a landowner who owned a vineyard, and some vine-growers who rented it. Here are the first three verses of Jesus’ parable,

produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.” Matthew 21:33-35 (NASB)

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his



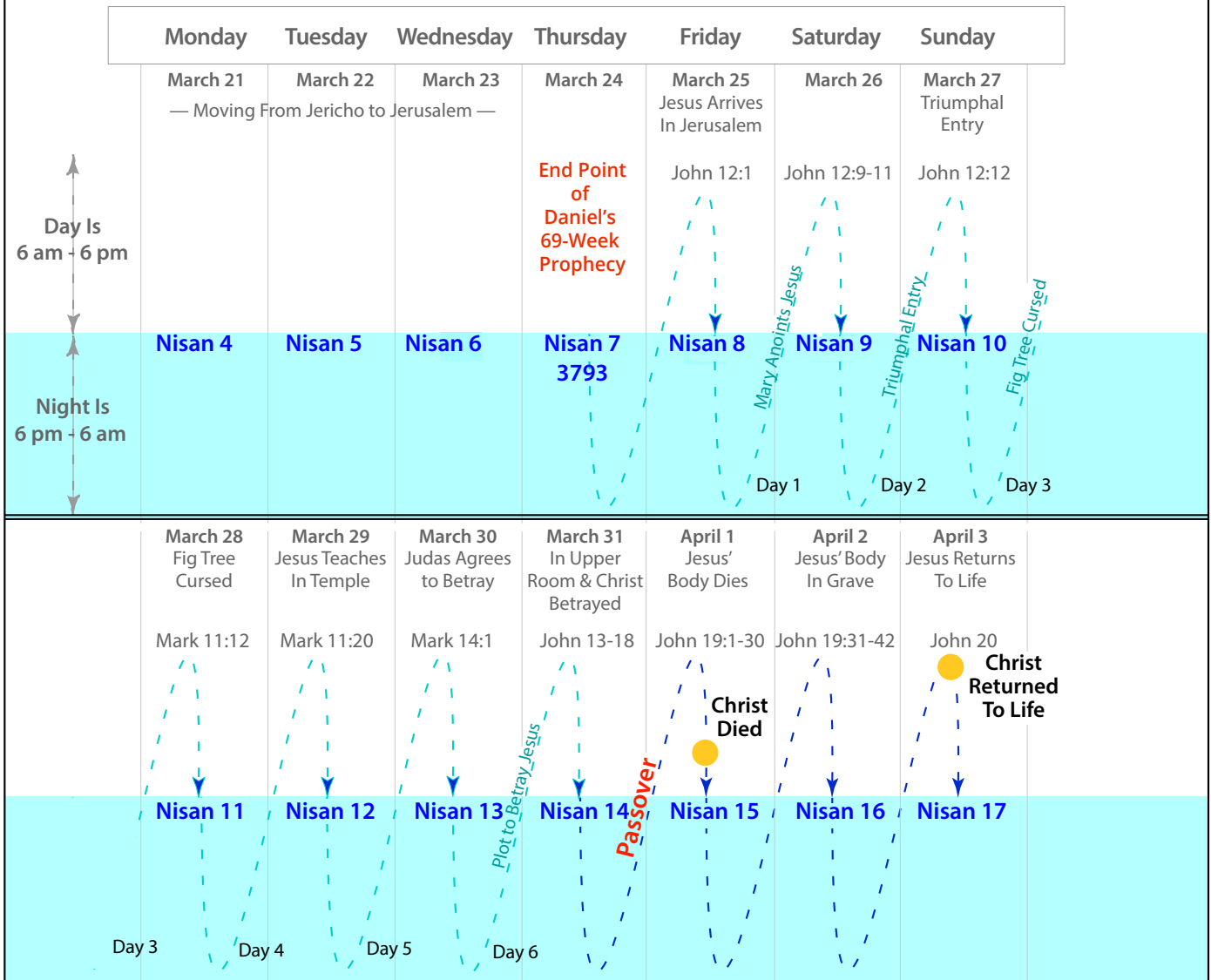
Parable of the Vineyard and Vine-growers

Immediately, we are introduced to the landowner who had planted a vineyard. It is important to note that the landowner owns the vineyard and plants it himself. He put a wall around it to protect it from animals and thieves. The wall would have also defined the boundary of his vineyard. The wall may have been made

of stone, rock, oven baked clay, wood, or some other material.

Next we are told he dug a hole and put a wine press into

## Last Week of Jesus' Life



it. Ralph Gower gives us this helpful description of a wine press in Jesus' time.

The wine press was a cistern cut out of rock with an exit hole in the bottom. The juice ran out of the hole into a vat or other collecting vessels. Several people at once would get into the cistern and tread the grapes with their feet to great laughter and enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

Next, the landowner built a tower. The tower would have been positioned with a watchman high into the air so that he could identify any approaching threat. Thus the vineyard, the wine press, any workers, and any animals could be protected.

Then he rented the vineyard out to some vine-growers, and took a journey believing that his investment was safe. Luke 20:9 says that the journey was a long one. This makes perfect sense. The landowner had invested money to build the vineyard for the purpose of earning money. It was an investment. The vine-growers could then water and care for

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Gower. Bereavement. The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times. Moody Publishers. 2005. p. 101.

the plants, harvest the produce, and sell them for a profit, after paying the landowner the required rental fee. The typical rental fee was 25-30%.<sup>2</sup> The landowner would realize his profit at harvest time. The best time to harvest grapes in Israel is between late July and early September.<sup>3</sup>

**Landowner's Slaves Were Rejected.** After the harvest was collected, the landowner sent some of his slaves to receive his share of the produce as payment for renting it to the vine-growers. Why not? He owned the vineyard and built it. He gave the vine-growers the opportunity to earn some money. But when the slaves arrived, the vine-growers beat one slave, murdered another slave, and stoned the third one.

These three slaves appear to have symbolized God's prophets, for we are told in Jeremiah 37:15-16 the prophet Jeremiah was beaten. Tradition claims that Isaiah was murdered or sawed in half.<sup>4</sup> Tradition also says that Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews at Taphanhes, Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Yet, there may be no intended symbolism to the three prophets because the parable is not about them.

Then in verse 36, we are told the landowner sent an even larger group of slaves.

**“Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.” Matthew**

2 Mark E. Moore. *The Chronological Life of Christ*. College Press. 1996. vol. 2, p. 159.”

3 Melissa T. Jackson. *When is grape harvest in Israel?*, chefsresource.com (www.chefsresource.com/when-is-grape-harvest-in-israel/)

4 Merril Unger. R. K. Harrison (editor). *The New Unger Bible Dictionary*. Moody Publishers. 2005. p. 629.

5 Ibid. p. 669.

## 21:36 (NASB)

But the vine-growers did the same thing to this group of slaves. These slaves could have symbolized another group of prophets. But since Scripture does not say what any of them did, it may not be true. Whoever the slaves symbolize, the meaning of verses 37-39 is clear. The vine-growers rejected everyone that the landowner sent to them.

Notice that Mark and Luke give different descriptions about what happened to the slaves. For example, Mark 12:3-6 says one slave was beaten, another one was wounded in the head, and a third was killed. Luke 20:10-12 says one slave was beaten, a second one was beaten and treated

shamefully, and a third one was wounded and cast out. This is typical of the gospel accounts. They often include some points and ignore other points in order to emphasize their message. If we compare Matthew 21:35 to Mark, it is clear that Mark ignored the second and larger group of



Wine Press In The Garden Tomb In Jerusalem

slaves. He focused on just the first group of three slaves. Luke seems to have only summarized the second group of slaves. Matthew does not provide any specifics about this group. So, there is no inconsistency.

**Landowner's Son Is Rejected.** Verses 37-39 state,

**“But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” Matthew 21:37-39 (NASB)**

Now we are told the landowner did *not* send more slaves. Sending more slaves would have been pointless for the vine-growers did not respect his slaves. If the slaves in this parable represented the prophets, then the parable is communicating that the leaders of Israel did not respect the prophets sent by God the Father. Rather than send more prophets, the landowner sent His own son. It is clear the son symbolizes Jesus Christ. Verse 39 says that when the vine-growers saw his son, they removed the son from the vineyard, which symbolizes Jerusalem, and killed Him. The gospels state that Jesus was removed from Jerusalem and taken outside of the city to a place called Golgotha (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17). Matthew and Mark suggest that the place of Jesus' crucifixion was beside a public road leading into the city. That is the end of the parable.

**Lord's Judgment.** Then Jesus asked the religious leaders a question designed to lead to His conclusion.

*“Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?” Matthew 21:40 (NASB)*

The English text does not reveal that the word “owner” is *kyrios* in the Greek. This Greek word means “lord or master.” He changed from landowner to Lord. I believe Jesus used this word because He was referring to God the Father. So, how would the religious leaders answer the question? Verse 41 give us their answer,

*They said to Him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.” Matthew 21:41 (NASB)*

The Greek word for “proceeds” is *karpos*. It means fruit. That is, the vine-growers did not pay the landowner any fruit from the vineyard. They had the correct conclusion. Since the vine-growers were guilty of murder and refusing to make payment for renting the vineyard, the Lord had the right to punish them and even to kill them.

**Religious Leaders Judged.** Verse 42 gives us Jesus' reply.

*Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures,*

*‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?’”*

*Matthew 21:42 (NASB)*

He quoted Psalm 118:22-23. Buildings that were made with stone or bricks usually placed one stone in a corner which was used to align the walls of the building. It was called a cornerstone. There were four cornerstones in a building. But the chief cornerstone was the first one placed into position. It determined the position and orientation of the building. The stone had to be perfectly cut at the right angles and smoothness. Otherwise, the walls of the building would be misaligned. It was a critical stone for the entire building.

So, why did Jesus quote Psalm 118:22-23? The answer is that it figuratively referred to Jesus. Acts 4 tells us that sometime after Jesus had ascended back to heaven, Peter stood before the Sanhedrin Council (Acts 4:5-7). Verse 8 tells us that Peter was standing before them and spoke. This is what happened next,

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:8-12 (NASB)*

So, whom did Peter identify as the chief corner stone? Jesus! Christ! Jesus was and is the chief cornerstone. Then he said that they, the Sanhedrin Council, had rejected Him. They had rejected the only one by whom they could be saved. They had rejected the only Savior. No one else can save us from our sins. This must have angered the Sanhedrin Council for Jesus had already quoted Psalm 118:22-23 in the parable we are studying. Now Peter quoted it to them again and directly applied to Jesus.

Also, Ephesians 2:19-21 tells us that Jesus is the chief cornerstone. He is the foundation of God's household, the holy temple in the Lord. The foundation of the church was built upon Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the prophets. Jude 17 tells us that believers are to remember the words that the apostles of our Lord Jesus had already spoken. Then Jude 3 adds that the faith had already been handed down to the saints. So we are to understand that the faith had been handed down by the apostles and Christ, and believers should forget the teachings of others who claim they have something new.

So, Psalm 118:22-23 was a prophecy about the rejection of Jesus Christ, their Messiah. It foretold that Israel's religious leaders would reject Him. Then Matthew 21:43 says,

**Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. Matthew 21:43 (NASB)**

Now Jesus tells them directly that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to another people. Amillennials, postmillennials, and preterists claim that the people refers to the church. But the Greek word for "people" is *ethnos*, refers to an ethnic group or a nation. It also refers to the Gentiles, or non-Jews. But Romans 11:1-26 reveals that Israel lost the privilege of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. So, Jesus referred to Gentiles. Second, when Jesus told them that the kingdom of God will be taken away, He did not mean that these religious leaders would lose their salvation, because they were never saved. This fact will become clear later in Matthew 23:13, when He tells them five times that they are spiritually blind. They are blind

guides (v. 16), blind men (v. 17), blind men (v. 19), blind guides (v. 24), and blind Pharisees (v. 26). Then in verse 28, He will show them that they,

**So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:28 (NASB)**
























These religious leaders were never going to enter into the kingdom, for John 12:42 states that most of them did not believe in Jesus. These were wicked men. The leaders of Israel had killed the prophets and these leaders would attack the apostles (Acts 4:5-11; 5:27-32) and kill an apostle (Acts 12:1-2). So in Matthew 23:30-31, we are told that Jesus said to these leaders that they would have joined in the murder of the prophets.

Therefore, when Jesus revealed that they would reject Him, the chief cornerstone, we now understand why He said the kingdom of God would be taken away from them. They had never believed in Christ. They were not believers. They were not going to have their sins forgiven and go to heaven. In addition, they thought they were the privileged ones who would enter the kingdom. But Jesus said, "No, you will not enter the kingdom." They thought that if anyone wanted to enter the kingdom, that person could come to them and discover how to enter. Instead, Jesus told them here and later in Matthew 23:13-39 that was no longer true. Indeed, the Gentiles would become the evangelists for the kingdom.

In the Old Testament, Israel was figuratively referred to as a vineyard multiple times (Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:6-16; Jeremiah 6:9). That appears to be the reason that Jesus used this parable about a vineyard. The point is that God the Father had "rented" His vineyard to Israel, and especially Jerusalem to the religious leaders of Israel (Romans 9:1-4). But they killed the prophets, or "the slaves" in the parable. Now in three days, they will kill the Son. So, the answer to Jesus' question, "What did God the Father do to those vine-growers?" was answered correctly. He will "bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers." Then Jesus added,

# Life and Heart of Jesus

The Last Week - March A.D. 33

	Parables About Religious Leaders	Jesus Is Questioned	Questioned by Sadducees	Questioned by Pharisees	Jesus Asked A Question	Pharisees Rebuked	Jesus Laments Jerusalem	Poor Widows' Gift	Beginning of Birth Pangs
Matthew	 21:28-22:14	 22:15-22	 22:23-33	 22:34-40	 22:41-46	 23:1-36	 23:37-39		 24:1-14
Mark	 12:1-12	 12:13-17	 12:18-27	 12:28-34	 12:35-37	 12:38-40		 12:41-44	 13:1-13
Luke	 20:9-19	 20:20-26	 20:27-40		 20:41-44	 20:45-47		 21:1-4	 21:5-19
John									

And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

Matthew 21:44 (NASB)

He who falls on Jesus will be broken to pieces. But the persons on whom Jesus falls will be scattered like dust. The Sanhedrin Council had fallen on Jesus, the chief cornerstone. Notice that Jesus said, “this stone.” Not just any stone but Jesus Himself. That is, those who reject Christ will not have their sins forgiven and experience the blessings of the Lord upon them. That is, they will be broken in pieces. Then, later at the judgment, Christ, who will be their judge, will send them to hell or the lake of fire. That is, they will be smashed into dust. 1 Corinthians 16:22 says that He who does not love the Lord will be accursed. This is a warning to religious leaders of today and everyone attending church who does not love the Lord Jesus.

## Religious Leaders' Self-Examination.

The next two verses reveal that the Sanhedrin Council understood that Jesus was describing them.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Matthew 21:45-46 (NASB)

Why did the religious leaders know that Jesus was describing them? They knew that they had already rejected Him. They knew that they were envious of Him (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10). They knew they had agreed to kill Him (John 5:18; 7:1; 11:53). Verse 46 reveals that this parable only further motivated them to kill Him, and two days later they did (Mark 14:1).

**Conclusion.** So, why did Jesus give them this parable? There are three reasons. First, the parable further motivated them to kill Him that week just as God the Father had planned (Acts 2:22-24). The Father's plan had reached its climax. The plan was for Jesus to die for our sins on the cross in fulfillment of so many prophecies. He was to die in fulfillment of one of the most significant and spectacular prophecies in the Old Testament. That prophecy was Daniel

9:24-26 which prophesied that Jesus would die after the date of March 24, A.D. 33. That date corresponds to the Thursday before Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Then He did die on April 1, A.D. 33. He died during the Passover as the ultimate sacrifice for your sins and my sins.

The second reason for the parable, was that it appears Jesus wanted them to know He knew they planned to kill Him (John 7:1, 25; 8:59; 10:31; 11:57). For all the people knew their plan (John 7:30, 32), and so did the disciples (John 11:8, 16). Jesus was no fool. He had returned to Jerusalem from His trip in Perea for the purpose of dying.

The third and maybe the primary reason for the parable, was to warn these men about the danger of rejecting Him. He warned them of what would happen if they did kill Him. He was telling them that they would not go to heaven. He, Himself, would become their judge and sentence them to hell.

It is also a warning to anyone else who rejects Jesus Christ. For Jesus said this in John 3:16-18,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:16-18 (NASB)

Jesus' message is that anyone who believes that He died in order to forgive their sins will have their sins forgiven. The proof that you truly believe this is true is that you will repent of your sins and want Him to forgive you. You will want to follow Him and want Him to make you righteous. So, are you like the religious leaders or do you desire that God forgive your sins and transform you?