

Prophetic Parables

Temple Parables

(2)

The Vineyard

Matthew 21:33-43

Mark 12:1-10

Luke 20:1-18

“The Divine Possessor of the Kingdom”

“The Righteous Son and Heir”

Matthew 21:33-43

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, **The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation** bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be

broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.”

Mark 12:1-10

“And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read

this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.”

Luke 20:1-18

“Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

This parable spoken by the Lord is found in each of the Synoptics. In Matthew it is the second of the three prophetic Temple parables recorded in chapters 21 and 22, and takes on a particular distinction. In presenting this parable the Lord uses the language and symbolism of the OT – especially of Isaiah, which would be familiar to the people of Israel who are His primary audience, and in so doing confirms the distinction between the Church and Israel. The parable may be divided into three broad themes – Israel’s *election* by God; Israel’s *rejection* of God and God’s *rejection* of Israel.

Israel’s election by God – Verse 33

The parable introduces us to a **certain householder** who is *God*, even the Father, the Lord of Hosts. He has a treasured **vineyard** – which, in keeping with the symbolism of the Bible is the nation of *Israel* – His “peculiar treasure above all people” (Ex 19:5). “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant” (Isa 5:7). He brought the Hebrew people out of Egyptian bondage to be His elect nation on earth. “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it” (Ps 80:8). God redeemed the nation, planted it and separated it. He appointed it with a tower and a winepress in order that it would be administered to reveal God’s power over all the earth and yield the wine that cheers God and man. He hedged it about with His Law. “From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num 23:9).

Next, we are introduced to the **husbandmen**. They are the *rulers* charged with the administration of the vineyard and to preserve and further the interests of the householder. The application of the husbandmen to Israel and its responsibility is unmistakable, because to them “were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom 9:4).

Clearly then, in this parable the Lord confirms the divine election of Israel and its national responsibility to God. It is an election that pertains to the *earth* – an earthly people who have been “planted” as a nation and set apart from all other nations. Scripture never speaks of the Church, the Body of Christ as being “planted.”¹ In this Israel stands in marked contrast to the Church which comprises God’s heavenly elect – the elect from *every* nation, in which there is neither Jew, Gentile, bond or free (Gal 3:28), “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). The Church is not a “fold” hedged about by the law; but “one flock” separated by the liberty of grace that is in Christ, and gathered around Him who is its Centre.

Israel’s rejection of God – the Heir of the Vineyard - Verses 34-39

Under its leaders the nation was expected to bear fruit unto God. As He always does, God made every good and gracious provision in order that this could take place. But the nation failed: it was essentially barren and the fruit it did produce was “wild” and “strange.” Isaiah pronounces the judgement. “My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes” (Isa 5:1-2). Jeremiah also records the failure of the nation. The vine brought out of Egypt had become strange and barren. “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jer 2:21).

¹ Paul speaks of a church being “planted,” but this refers to the establishment of a local testimony through the preaching of the Gospel. Here it is God that gives the increase.

In these passages Isaiah and Jeremiah identified the nation's *dereliction in stewardship* in the things of God. Neglect and departure brought forth wild grapes and bitter wine – the fruit of rebellion – disobedience towards God's law and ordinances. In the Lord's parable of the vineyard however, the focus is upon the nation's *rejection of sonship* – of the Son of God. We are told that the servants sent by the householder were stoned and killed. "But last of all" - in a final gesture of goodwill and grace the householder sent **his own son** and **heir** to oversee his estate and reap fruit from it. But what did the husbandmen do? They killed him in order that they may inherit the estate of the son and heir.² Israel was elected by God to display His power and glory in blessing over all the earth. It failed under the Old Covenant – a failure which God remedies under the New Covenant. God's angels will gather His earthly elect from the four corners of the world – both Israel and Judah – all who are written in the book (Dan 12:1), and then, through the accepted Heir and Possessor of all the earth, He will manifest His glory and power over it. It is remarkable and instructive that this parable, like the prophecy of Daniel 2 settles on the Person who is the "stone" that was cut out without hands (Dan 2:45).

The parable of the vineyard is a divine indictment of Israel at the time of the Lord and of the present and prevailing generation of unbelief among its people. God had sent His prophets among Israel – His vineyard, but they built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous. "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city" (Matt 23:34). God then sent His own Son and Heir to Israel – even a prophet like unto Moses in a final expression of His love and mercy. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son whom he hath appointed heir of all things" (Heb 1:1-2).

Jesus of Nazareth - the Son and Husbandmen of God, His Heir, was sent to Israel. His sonship was endorsed by the descent of the Spirit and the divine approbation, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). The Son offered in and through Himself every covenanted blessing to the nation on the ground of repentance and righteousness. But it refused Him and, like the son in the parable God's well beloved Son was seized and cast outside His Father's vineyard – even outside the camp and crucified. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (Jn 1:11). Stephen declared the national condemnation. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Fittingly, Matthew records the Lord's searching questions regarding His rejected sonship and inheritance. "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is He His son?" (Matt 22:42-46). It was just before His prophetic discourse on Mount Olivet, that the Lord indicted the nation and brought the prophetic and moral lesson of this parable into view - the rejection of the sonship of the greatest Son of Israel. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt 23:37).

² When a sole heir died a Jewish law permitted an estate to be divided among any who held interest in the property.

Israel's rejection by God – Verses 40-46

There are two aspects to consider here.

- **Destruction:** The parable continues with the prediction that the Lord of the vineyard will come and destroy the wicked husbandmen, who not only abrogated their responsibility over the vineyard, but killed his son and heir to the vineyard.
- **Deprivation:** The Lord declares that the “vineyard” and the “kingdom of God” shall be forfeited and given away to “others” and another “nation” respectively.

The destruction of the wicked husbandmen – the generation of unbelieving Jews

Appropriately, the declaration of destruction comes from the mouths of those to whom it applies – the generation of unbelieving Jews – represented by the wicked husbandmen. The Lord does not comment on it, but the prophetic application is clear. God – the Householder will come in the Person of His Son and Heir – at His Second Advent. Then He shall gather the husbandmen – the nation, for judgment. “And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezek 20:35-38). The unsaved of Israel at that time – the wicked husbandmen, will be cast into eternal judgment as declared in another prophetic parable. “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Matt 25:31).³

The deprivation - the vineyard and the kingdom of God are forfeited

The vineyard forfeited

When we speak of “Israel” we refer to the people who are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom 9:4). In every account of this parable the fate of the wicked husbandmen and the vineyard – Israel, is recorded. As we mentioned, the former are “destroyed.” The lord’s possession over which they had charge – the vineyard, figurative of the nation of Israel however is forfeited and given away “to others.” The “others” refer to other **husbandmen** (*georgos*) - to the faithful believing remnant of Israel at the end of the Tribulation. They will inherit the national covenanted promises during the Millennium which follows the time of national judgment. Unlike the wicked husbandmen they “shall render Him [the Lord of the harvest] the fruits in their seasons.”

The kingdom of God forfeited

In keeping with the dispensational theme of his Gospel, Matthew includes a number of distinguishing elements of the parable. For instance, in relation to the forfeiture of the vineyard, he records the full text of the answer given by the Jews to the Lord’s question, “What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them [the wicked husbandmen]?” “They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” It was, after all, Matthew who was inspired to record

³ The living faithful among Israel at the Second Advent – “all Israel,” will enter the Millennial Kingdom under the reign of the Messiah King and Heir. They are those who are left and figured in Matthew 24:39-41. The others are taken away in judgment (swept away as in the days of Noah). The “flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken [in judgment], and the other left [to enter the Millennial Kingdom]. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken [in judgment], and the other left [to enter the Millennial Kingdom].”

that other indictment the Jews made against themselves. “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25).

Notably, in keeping with the theme of his Gospel Matthew brings in the forfeiture of the **kingdom**. It is not now the vineyard forfeited by the wicked husbandmen – but the *kingdom* that was to be theirs. It was to be given to another **nation** (*ethnos*) - not to other husbandmen or *georgos*). The Messiah – the Son of God came and offered the kingdom to Israel on the moral principle brought out and affirmed in the first of these three prophetic Temple parables - righteousness and repentance. It rejected Him - the “stone that the builders rejected,” and put Him to death.

Accordingly, the kingdom and its covenanted blessings were forfeited by that unbelieving generation and given to another nation - the *Church*, of which the rejected stone – *Christ*, is the head of the corner. Speaking of the Church, Peter declares “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9). The Church comprising saved Jew and Gentile compose the one new man in Christ, which is now the object of God’s purposes and pleasure within His kingdom – even the kingdom of His Son. “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). Who is “the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence” (Col 1:18).⁴ Matthew’s account of this parable brings in the Church as occupying the present phase of the kingdom of God. It is his Gospel that records the construction and the fundamental confession of the Church, confirmed by the Head of the corner. “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18).

Some vital observations

The vineyard and the kingdom

Nowhere in Scripture are we told that God’s *vineyard* – Israel and its covenant blessings are given to another *nation* – as replacement theology would have us believe. It is the *kingdom* that is given to another nation – this present kingdom of the Church age, on account of Israel’s rejection of the kingdom offered to it. Scripture is careful to preserve the truth that in the purposes of God Israel and the Church are distinct and that Israel has a future beyond this present Church age – the “fullness of the Gentiles.” “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles [that other nation] be come in” (Rom 11:25).

The vineyard on the other hand is given to other *husbandmen* – the faithful Jewish remnant that will arise during the Tribulation. There are no faithful husbandmen in Israel today.⁵ Israel as a nation is now abiding in unbelief and is set aside for impending judgment. But in a day beyond, the natural branches will be grafted back into the olive tree. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again” (Rom 11:23). In a day to come – the Millennial Kingdom, they will constitute “all Israel” (Rom 11:26) – the “other husbandmen” who, through the very hands which the nation pierced, possess and administer the unconditional promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

⁴There is a coming millennial day however as we note throughout, in which the vineyard – Israel, will be given the kingdom, inherited by the faithful remnant.

⁵Though there is an elect of Israel according to grace within the Church (Rom 11:5). Paul was one of them, but he was within the Church as a son of God alongside the saved Gentiles; of the Israel of God who with all in the Body walk according to the rule of the new creation in Christ (Gal 3:16).

The “Stone”

The stone that was rejected by the nation is the Head of the corner. God *has* laid in Zion, that place of promise, a precious corner stone, which is a pledge made to the faithful remnant in the Tribulation and constitutes their hope. “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste [flee in terror]” (Isa 28:16). Jacob had spoken of this earlier. “But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)” (Gen 49:24). In keeping with the Jewish and prophetic aspect of his first epistle, Peter identifies Christ as the “corner stone” of Zion. “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Pet 2:6). However, in the very next verse he turns his attention to the present day and the Church and presents Christ as its cornerstone as well. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the Head of the corner” (1 Pet 2:7). Note the distinction again between Israel and the Church given in the juxtaposition of these two verses and in the expressions “unto *you*” and “the same is *become* the Head of the corner” - that which was not seen in OT prophecy. Israel and the Church are separate entities. For the former Christ the Corner Stone was and still is, as will be made manifest in that millennial day; for the latter, Christ has *become* the Corner Stone, a reality in this present day.