

Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-10; Luke 20:9-18)
Rebuking disbelieving religious leaders

1. To begin to understand a parable, it is important to observe who Jesus is speaking to. What do you see?

Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matt 21:23, NASB)

2. When there are multiple accounts of a parable, divide the three passages into their corresponding sections to see how they compare and what details each author reveal about the parable. What do you observe about the vineyard, its wall, vat, and tower? Is there a pattern to how the slaves were treated by the vine-growers?

Matthew 21:33-34 (NASB)	Mark 12:1-5 (NASB)	Luke 20:9-12 (NASB)
<p>33) "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.</p> <p>34) When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35) The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36) Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.</p>	<p>1) And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.</p> <p>2) At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. 3) They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4) Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. 5) And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others.</p>	<p>9) And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time.</p> <p>10) At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him some of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11) And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. 12) And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out.</p>

3. Carefully observe the parable and fill out the last chart to learn its meaning.

Matthew 21:37-44 (NASB)	Mark 12:6-10 (NASB)	Luke 20:13-18 (NASB)
<p>37) But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38) 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.' 39) They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40) Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" 41) 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."</p> <p>42) 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'?"</p> <p>43) 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. 44) And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."</p>	<p>6) He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7) But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' 8) They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9) What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others.</p> <p>10) Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; 11) THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"</p>	<p>13) The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14) But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' 15) So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16) He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!"</p> <p>17) But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone'?"</p> <p>18) Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."</p>

Image	What does it represent?	Meaning?
Vineyard		
Landowner		
Tenants		
Slaves		
Son		

Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-10; Luke 20:9-18)
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Teacher Notes

1. To begin to understand a parable, it is important to observe who Jesus is speaking to. What do you see?

Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matt 21:23, NASB)

Remind the student that recognizing who Jesus is talking to helps one figure out the point of the parable. Ask the student: who is Jesus speaking to? When you read the parable, who would be capable of understanding it?

Jesus is teaching to people in the temple when the chief priests, scribes and elders approach and challenge His authority to do miracles and teach (Matt 21:12-17, 23-27; Mark 11:15-18; 27-33; Luke 20:20:1-8). Matthew 21:33 opens with, "Listen to another parable" which draws a connection or sequence with the preceding Parable of the Two Sons. The Parable of the Tenants is Jesus' second consecutive parable directed at the Jewish religious leaders, which they understood and were quite angry. However, the parable could well be directed at other Jews who shared the same views as their religious leaders.

2. When there are multiple accounts of a parable, divide the three passages into their corresponding sections to see how they compare and what details each author reveal about the parable. What do you observe about the vineyard, its wall, vat, and tower? Is there a pattern to how the slaves were treated by the vine-growers?

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This question places a focus on one's skill in observation and how each account contributes to a fuller picture of the parable. Help the student by asking him to circle what the landowner does: vineyard, wall, winepress, and tower. In so doing, the student will see how each account compares.

Teach the student the cultural context:

Walls were often built about vineyards to keep out animals. The winepress and vat were constructed such that the grape juice would flow to the lowest point. A watch tower served as a lookout to guard against thieves and fire. Wealthy landowners often leased their land out to tenant farmers in a sharecropping deal where rent is paid as a portion of production. During the first century, the landowners were usually Roman, which did not sit well with Galilean Jews.

Ask the student: is there a pattern to how the slaves were mistreated?

Teach the student the cultural context:

There is an ascending level of ill treatment: 1) beating, 2) killing and 3) stoning. Stoning is considered worse as an execution for apostasy or false prophecy and implies disgrace as well as death.

3. Carefully observe the parable and fill out the last chart to learn its meaning.

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Ask the student: what happened to the son of the landowner?

Teach the student the cultural context:

With the arrival of the son, tenant farmers presume that the landowner has passed away. In murdering the heir, the vineyard becomes an ownerless property which becomes available to the first squatters according to Jewish law. However the parable portrays the tenants as being too presumptuous, because there are a number of ways the land could have been inherited and not necessarily through the son. The parable is intended to portray the tenants as wicked and stupid.

Ask the student: what did the landowner do?

Teach the student the cultural context:

It was well known that landowners had the legal and social power to exert their will on tenants so this question would have been on everyone's mind. Asking questions was a standard rabbinic way of involving the listeners of the teaching. Why did the landowner take so long to evict the evil tenants? In answering the question, the listeners pronounce judgment on themselves. All three gospel accounts report that the landowner will destroy the offending vine-growers and get new ones.

Ask the student: what is Jesus calling attention to when He asks, "have you not read?" How do you find the Old Testament passage Jesus is citing?

A stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This came about from the Lord;
It is marvelous in our eyes. (Ps 118:22-23, NASB)

Here is where a commentary can be useful and provide the Old Testament citation for further study. Psalm 118 is a song praising God's loyal love. It describes a man of God who was appointed by divine choice to a high position in the nation of Israel (i.e. king). This chosen champion found himself rejected by his friends and fellow countrymen, and at the same time violently opposed by his enemies. With faith in God, he battles for his nation, and he triumphs in such a manner that displays the power and goodness of the Lord. King David would be an example of "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" when Samuel, expecting the older sons of Jesse to be the next king, realized that God had chosen the youngest.

Psalm 118:22-23 is one of the most quoted Old Testament verses in the New Testament (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:7, and paraphrased in Eph 2:20). In the construction of ancient stone structures, the cornerstone was the first and most important stone laid down. Also known as the foundation stone or capstone, it served as the reference point for the layout of all corners of the building and its entire structure. In many instances, the name of the architect and the date of construction can be found on the cornerstone.

Jesus, from lowly Nazareth (John 1:46), did not fit the expectation of Jewish religious leaders. He was not the military leader that would overthrow Roman rule and restore the greatness of the nation. Jesus did not meet the qualifications for the cornerstone that the Jewish religious leaders sought. In recalling Psalm 118:22-23, not only does Jesus claim to be the Messiah, but He is the rejected Cornerstone of the kingdom of God who will be vindicated and exalted.

Image	What does it represent?	Meaning?
Vineyard	Kingdom of God	Matthew 21:43 is the only account that further explains the parable. Jews have always understood the image of the vineyard to be a reference to the nation of Israel.
Landowner	God	
Tenants	Jewish religious authorities	Jewish religious leaders were charged with the “cultivation” of Israel’s religious life.
Slaves	Old Testament prophets	Sent by God, OT prophets have been killed (1 Kings 18:4, 13; Jer 26:20-23) and stoned (2 Chron 24:21-22).
Son	Jesus Christ	The parable can be seen as a veiled messianic self-reference of Himself by Jesus.

Ask the student: summarize what two things Jesus said Jewish religious leaders were guilty of? Hint: what happened to the slaves and the son of the landowner in the parable?

1. Jewish religious leaders had a history of mistreating and murdering God’s prophets in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:4, 13; Jer 26:20-23; 2 Chron 24:21-22).
2. Jewish religious leaders understood Jesus’ messianic claim and refused to accept His authority. But unable to come to terms with His messianic identity, they were initially not out to kill Him. Through this parable, Jesus told the religious leaders themselves what they will do.

Ask the student: what two things did Jewish religious authorities learn about their nation?

1. The Jews discover, contrary to their belief, that Jesus did not equate the nation of Israel with the kingdom of God.
2. When the landowner judged to destroy the wicked tenants and give the vineyard over to others, the Jews recognized this as their nation being given over to another, which prompted their response in Luke 20:16, “may it never be!” God’s response to Israel’s rejection of His Son will be Israel’s removal of their caretaking of the kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Tenants reveals to the nation that Israel is not the kingdom of God and, as stewards of the kingdom, they will be replaced.