

# Gospel of Matthew

## 21:33~46

### *The War of the Vineyard!*



Some of these stories that Jesus tells are not nuanced. They do not have many meanings to glean throughout them. The last story about the two sons – the disagreeable one who ended up obeying his father and the agreeable son who ended up disobeying his father. There was one basic meaning at the end of that story. But in this parable today I would say that there are quite a few metaphors running throughout the storyline. That makes this one more interesting for me!

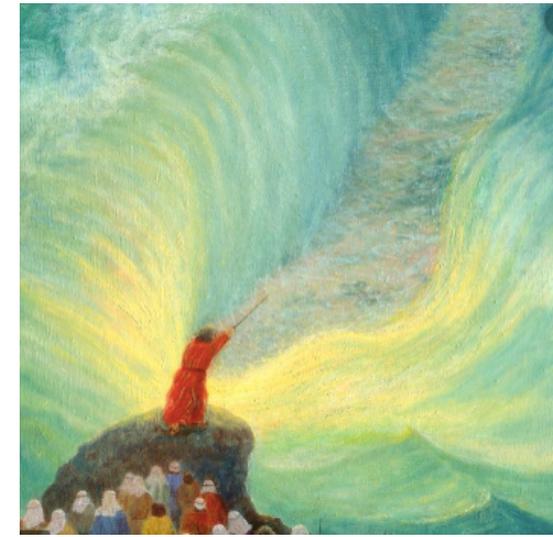
The Vineyard in my estimation is a basic metaphor for the plan of God which began even before Adam and Eve in Eden – a plan that was formed in the mind of God and in the early planning stages before God even created life on this planet.

**[1 Pet. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 1:9b-10]**

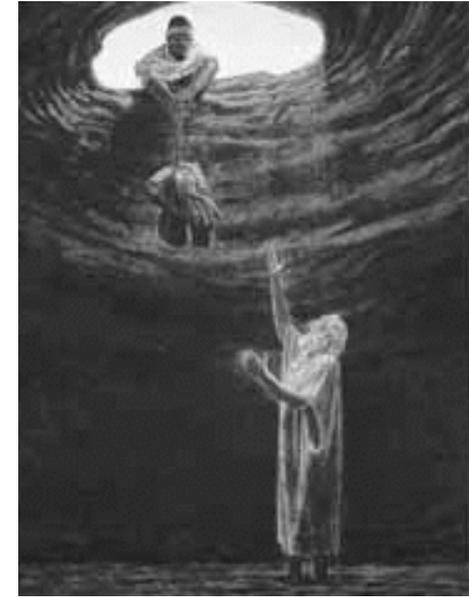
The tenants/renters of the vineyard are the Hebrew people, the Jews, Israel. The Jews were carefully interjected into the middle of God's plan to bring salvation to the world. God chose a pagan man, a Semite man named Abram. Why Abram was chosen we cannot possibly know. God knew something about the man, his genetics, his characteristics, we can speculate all we want but we really don't know why him in particular. I think it is obvious that Abram and His wife Sarai were *not* chosen randomly. We know they had clear purpose. But it wasn't just he and his wife Sarai that were chosen for a purpose, but their descendants as well. The descendants too were the major part of the bargain that God made with Abraham! If you were in some way related to the Patriarch, you were part of a *chosen nation*. It took 400 years for their numbers to increase to the point where they would become an actual nation. There were other individuals in the genetic line of Abraham who would stand out as important to the plan. Jacob, his grandson was quite a character. But God loved and protected him and guided His life, even weaving his many sins and mistakes into productive threads within God's plan!



Jacob was given the name “Israel” by God from which his descendants would inherit their national name. He had 12 sons by two wives and two concubines, and among them was a son name Joseph who was betrayed by his 10 older half-brothers who were jealous of his favored status with their father. They sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, where God manipulated outcomes and Joseph went from prison to 2<sup>nd</sup> in command in all of Egypt. Joseph discovered that his brothers were changed men, remorseful for what they had done, and he forgave His brothers and brought all their families and his father, Jacob to Egypt, where they were given some of the best land in the country to live. There, in the protective cradle of the strongest country on earth at the time, they grew in numbers until they became a nation within a nation. This was not by chance - none of it! God was pulling strings in a way that we don’t normally see Him do. But He was making this nation happen! He had a plan and these Israelites had a job to do for Him. Then, almost 400 years after Joseph, it was time for Israel’s “exodus” from Egypt. So he raised up another special man, Moses. Moses was chosen by God to help the Israelites escape Egypt, but not before exacting a terrible Divine judgment upon Egypt for having badly mistreated the Israelites! Moses led the nation across the Red Sea in probably the most fantastical miracle since the beginning of time when the laws of physics were stood on their head. Then there were many other miracles to preserve this nation on the move. And it was then that God took Moses up the mountain and gave Him the commandments and the Mosaic Law. He brought them into a land that we now know as Palestine and gave it to them. He gave them that land for two reasons. They needed a place of their own, and the inhabitants of that place had made themselves worse than the animals. It was God’s desire that the inhabitants be eradicated because they were incorrigible and beyond all help and their culture was infectious! Then came the judges, and then the kings, (one of which was King David included in the bloodline of the Messiah), and then the great and sustained times of unfaithfulness to God, idolatry, and moral chaos. These were followed by invasion, captivities/slavery, and domination, by a succession of the Assyrians, Babylon, the Syrians, Greeks, and finally the Romans.

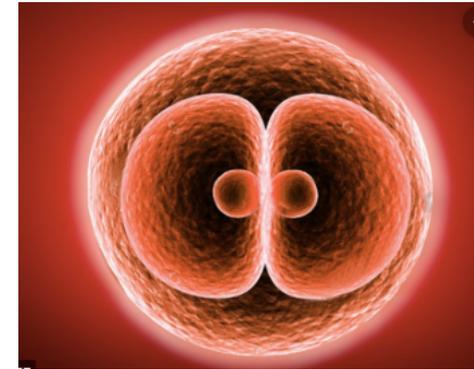


All throughout salvation history in the Old Testament, the people of Israel had given the messengers of God a hard time. Even though they have seen first-hand the power of God wielded by Moses, the freshly-minted Israelites sought to kill Moses and go back to Egypt or select new leadership of their own rather than who God had chosen. The life of the great and powerful prophet Elijah was constantly in danger from King Ahab and queen Jezebel. The prophet Jeremiah's life was frequently in danger from priests and King. He was put in stocks and had to endure ridicule and abuse. He was thrown into a cistern to starve to death but was rescued by a foreigner. He was imprisoned for long periods of time - all for relaying his messages from God. In contrast, when the Babylonians conquered the land - just as Jeremiah had prophesied that they would, they freed him and treated him with great kindness and deference! But *all* the prophets of God were not listened to, were opposed and ridiculed, and their dire predictions of God's judgments had to come true, and the people brought down to the lowest point before any repentance and change began to happen!



This was all well-known history of the Jewish people. His listeners knew it well, especially the religious leaders who had made plans to murder Jesus and so were absolutely following in the repressive and murderous steps of their ancestors. In this parable of the War of the Vineyard, Jesus is using analogy to refer back to the sorry history of the Jewish people with God's messengers! Of course it begins with the land the vineyard was on belonging to the owner, the landlord. God had given Israel their home in Palestine, but he ultimately owns all the earth. He certainly owned the Middle East. So in that sense, the Israelites were tenants on his land. They could call the land their home, but God's name was on the deed. As landowner He could exact rent from His tenants! God was asking for a normal return on His investment but was being refused and his messengers were being abused every time they were sent!

So Jesus is recalling in this parable a thinly veiled Jewish history. He is recalling it to the religious leaders who were there in number and to all other people who were there at the temple listening to Him teach – most of who were there on Passover pilgrimage. But the story has a new twist! All the previous servant-messengers from the owner were rejected and abused. So finally the vineyard owner sent another messenger, but not just any messenger. He sent his son, who you would think would carry great weight with the tenants – even rebellious ones - having the full authority of His father, their landlord! But the farmer-tenants are so enamored of their own power by this time, and emboldened by their success at not ever having given the vineyard owner what they owed him, that when they discover the messenger is the owner's son, they take him out of the vineyard and butcher him. They have reasoned, quite unreasonably, that now they can take over the vineyard themselves! By murdering the owner's son they think they have shown the owner who is boss. But, of course, that is not how it works out. Jesus actually asks the crowd what they think the vineyard owner would do. They all agree that the owner would come himself and bring all the tenants who did this awful thing to a swift and terrible justice! Then - they say - He would rent his vineyard out to new tenants who would actually pay him rent. How telling, that the people, the religious leaders included, know what is proper justice here! ***Jesus has gotten them to pronounce judgement upon themselves!*** Of course, what is going on with Jesus closely parallels this story. He knows that the people entrusted with religious leadership in the nation are going to kill Him! He was their final messenger from God, who was both messenger from God and Son of God! No one ever sent by God was more of a prophet than Jesus! He was the very Word of God, second member of God's inner triunity, who had become God's Son when God had miraculously and without sexual contact, made Mary, the mother of Jesus, pregnant by combining her genes with divinely altered DNA to form that messianic zygote.



After getting them to pronounce judgment upon themselves, Jesus then quotes from Ps.118:22,23. This was a messianic prophecy, that speaks of the fact that the Messiah would be rejected by Israel, but God who sent Him would not let that stand! The stone the building stone-masons had thrown out would rise and become the capstone or cornerstone of the building - the most important foundational stone of the whole structure! He was speaking not of Jesus being the cornerstone of the Jewish nation – because obviously was not going to happen at this time – but Jesus was to be The Cornerstone of the plan of the Creator/God to bring the offer of salvation to the entire world! God’s plan had always been to use the Hebrew people to reach the whole world. They weren’t on board with the plan, so God was basically using them against their will. He was working around their resistance. **FIRST**, Jesus was born a Jew, born into the bloodline of a King! **SECONDLY**, the crucifixion and resurrection happened, just as God planned it, during the Jewish holiday of Passover. This was an annual event when pilgrimage to the temple at Jerusalem was mandatory for all practicing Jews. So this was when the Jews of the dispersion who were spread around the known world would all would hop on ships, or join caravans that would travel across the land to make the journey to Jerusalem. By “Jews of the dispersion” or “the diaspora”, I mean *descendants of the Jewish captives* who had been taken into slavery from the successive conquests of the past (approximately) 500 years. So they were all there in Jerusalem at the time of Passover to witness what was destined by God to happen to His Son – the cross. By God’s design, they would take that back home as a very hot topic. Later, when Christian missionaries, like Paul, came to those cities and began speaking of Jesus, beginning always at the local Jewish synagogue, they would already know of Jesus and his death on the cross.



When the missionaries arrived, all they had to do was explain what the cross meant as the centerpiece of God's Messianic plan! The Jews of the diaspora, enclaved in these gentile cities in Jewish boroughs, were more inclined to believe than the Jews in Judea. The Jews in Judea were forbidden by the temple religious establishment to consider Christ as the long awaited Messiah. But the influence Jerusalem upon the Jews of the diaspora was not much. And so many of these Jews in foreign countries believed the message of the missionary Apostles, and believed in Jesus and His gospel, and churches quickly sprang up in the major cities everywhere in the known world! Those churches after initial success, would finally encounter hostile resistance from the Jews in charge of the local synagogues, and so would turn their attentions to reaching their gentile neighbors and colleagues with the gospel. But the key is that, according to God's plan, the gentiles responded well and believe in Jesus en masse and were added to the churches, greatly swelling the numbers of gentile converts **meeting** and **learning** (*initially from Jewish Christians*) and **supporting** each other, and then **being sent out** to bring others into the church! It is still the way a legitimate church is supposed to function today!



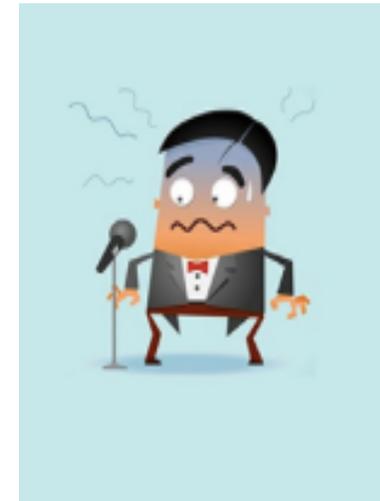
Look at what Jesus concluded His thoughts with in verses **43,44**.

The plan was already moving away from Israel. Israel was going to be judged for their reaction to all of God's messengers, but especially for this last one – Jesus. Their hatred and rejection of Him, their sanction of His torture at the hands of the Romans, and His upcoming murder. They were doing this as an act of their own will. There is judgment for sin and when you murder the Son of God, you might expect that you better start ducking because you know its coming!



Yet, we know that every one of us had a hand in the murder of the Christ! He came to die for *our* sins! The religious leaders of Judea were put in place by God and then at just the right time, simply played their part, almost as if they had it memorized, just as God anticipated that they would! But they did what was in their own heart! God did not place this evil intent into them any more than He puts any evil intent to sin in your heart or mine. Evil intent is ours and ours alone! We act on it and God anticipates the evil we do and weaves it into the fabric of whatever it is He needs to accomplish. Now this is not the norm. Most often our sins serve no larger purpose of God's. Maybe in general it brings cause and effect into play - pain and suffering - and therefore we possible learn from it that sin hurts. But usually sins are useless and destructive misuses of our time and energy, our hungers and desires and ambitions. But *in this particular instance* the evil men do was showing up in the midst of God's plan and He was not letting it go to waste!

Always, at the end, the lesson begs important questions of us. There are always implications that need to be examined in our mind. What I would like us to think about this time is this. God rejected Israel and moved on from them because they rejected His messengers and His mission. There is much in the gospels about God's rejection. He rejects people who reject Him. And He rejects people who reject His purposes being place upon their lives! He calls such people unfruitful. There is probably no one here today within the sound of my voice that has completely rejected God or His Son Jesus. But there may be a number of us who believe but really have no plans to let Him interfere with our *own* plans and purposes! We will just go on living our lives and He will be a nice part of it on at least 1/2 to 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of our Sundays! But God can't possible expect me to talk to people about Jesus! *Ahh, but it's clear that He does!* It scares me! *The definition of courage is doing things you are scared to do!* I might make a fool of myself! *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing"*, so of course you might! They might get mad at me! *That is a risk we must be willing to take because someone's souls is at stake!* I wouldn't know how to begin or what to say! *Jesus promised that His Spirit would help us!* That is NOT my gift! *The power of God only shows up brighter in our weakness!* I don't know anyone who would actually listen, or accept an invite! *Then you just need to get out more! Get involved! Meet people!*



*We have 3 obvious opportunities at Bethany in the next 5 weeks. One is **tonight** – Movie Night @ Bethany. It is about people responses to Christ – yea or nay! Then there is the **Bethany Valentine's Banquet**, Sunday Feb 9! And finally there is Bethany's Wild Game Feast on Sunday evening March 8<sup>th</sup>. But in between there is the Super Bowl. That could be an unforced opportunity also to invite a neighbor, friend, colleague, into your living room. Invite some of your Bethany friends too!*