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### **Isaiah chapter 5**

#### **English Standard Version**

**1**Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. **2**He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. **3**And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. **4**What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? **5**And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. **6**I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. **7**For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

#### **Context Summary**

Isaiah 5:1–7 contains Isaiah's parable about his beloved about their vineyard. His beloved invests time and money to dig stones from the field, plant vines, build a watchtower, and make vats. He does all this work only to find the resulting grapes are sour and useless. The owner declares he will lay waste to the vineyard since the fruit is not good. Isaiah reveals that the vineyard is Israel and the owner is the Lord. He expected Judah to produce justice and integrity,

but instead it has yielded trampling down of the weak and an ignoring of God's ways.

### **Isaiah 5:1**

#### **ESV**

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

**What does Isaiah 5:1 mean?** The first seven verses of chapter 5 contain a parable. A parable is an example in the format of a story which contains a spiritual truth or lesson. In these verses Isaiah begins with a love song and ends with condemnation. It becomes clear later on that Isaiah is speaking of the Lord as his "beloved".

This is unusual language from Isaiah, but not unheard of for writers of Scripture. The prophet is humble before the Lord. He also obeys the commandment to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might. (Deuteronomy 6:5). His use of the title "beloved" shows his affection for God goes beyond mere obedience and service.

The singer's beloved is said to have a vineyard on a hill. A vineyard is a field used for farming grapes. These were common metaphors in the Bible, as they were common in and around Israel's more mountainous region. This example was relevant to Isaiah's audience. Everyone in that era knew something about how vineyards were developed and maintained to produce the best crops of wine grapes possible.

When selecting the location for a vineyard, soil would be the first consideration on a farmer's mind. If the soil wasn't good, nothing good was likely to grow properly from it. The soil for this hilltop vineyard was perfectly fertile and would be useful for growing vines. For the purposes of this parable, neither the soil nor the location of the vineyard could be blamed for any worthless produce.

### **Isaiah 5:2**

#### **ESV**

He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

**What does Isaiah 5:2 mean?** Isaiah's song for his beloved continues with his description of all the painstaking work put into building and cultivating this vineyard. Producing wine grapes from a new vineyard in this region was a multi-year process. The limestone in the earth made the soil especially fertile and good for growing grapes, but it was also presented a problem. Large stones were found both above and below the surface of the ground. These had to be removed before any planting could begin.

The prophet goes on to describe how his beloved dug up all the stones and moved them out of the way. The stones were often used to build a wall around the vineyard to keep out animals. They were also used to erect a watchtower in the center of the vineyard so guards could be on the lookout for thieves during the time of the grape harvest.

Before building the watchtower, the farmer would plant the grape vines as soon as he could. It would take two years for the vines to take root and begin to produce usable grapes. While waiting for his harvest, the farmer would also create two large vats, an upper and a lower, in addition to the watchtower. When the first harvest was ready, the upper vat would be used to press the juice from the grapes. The juice would flow down into the lower vat, which served as a settling basin.

The song describes how, after his beloved had gone through all this work and waited for his first harvest, the grapes turned out to be "wild." Other translations for the word "wild" might be "stinking" or "sour." Instead of the sweet grapes used for making wines, the owner discovers after all the work he has put in his vineyard the harvest is worthless.

The following five verses (Isaiah 5:3–7) will continue to reveal that Isaiah's beloved is the Lord and Israel is the vineyard which has produced such disappointing results; the conclusion to the parable comes in Isaiah 5:7.

### **Isaiah 5:3**

#### **ESV**

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

**What does Isaiah 5:3 mean?** This parable started as if it were a love song (Isaiah 5:1). Isaiah describes how his beloved did all the hard work to develop a

vineyard only to discover in the end that the grapes were sour and worthless for their purpose (Isaiah 5:2).

Now Isaiah shifts to the voice of the vineyard-maker. He calls out to his audience to ask them to weigh in on the matter. He will ask if there was anything he could have done differently to receive a different result (Isaiah 5:4). This is a rhetorical question, of course, meant to point out that the Master is not the problem.

### Isaiah 5:4

#### **ESV**

What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

**What does Isaiah 5:4 mean?** At this point in Isaiah's parable, his beloved calls out to the men of Jerusalem and Judah. He specifically asks if there was anything more he could have done to avoid this outcome. The answers of those who hear these questions are not recorded. In a region with so many vineyard workers, it's likely that many men would have had opinions about what could have been done differently or what should be done next.

The great strength of a parable like this is that it could get the reader thinking about how he or she would answer these questions. Parables are most helpful when they engage the audience and have the reader put themselves inside the story. This will likely cause the impact to be that much stronger when Isaiah reveals the true meaning behind the song in Isaiah 5:7. In this case, the question is more of a statement: *I did everything correctly, so the blame is not mine.*

### Isaiah 5:5

#### **ESV**

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

**What does Isaiah 5:5 mean?** Isaiah's song takes an unexpected turn for those who have not yet realized what the song is about. He has described the worthless grapes yielded by his beloved's vineyard (Isaiah 5:2). He has gone as far as to ask those listening if there was anything more he could have done (Isaiah 5:4). Now the farmer will declare his intentions: to leave the vineyard to be utterly destroyed.

The farmer declares that he will remove the protective hedge which keeps animals out. Since there is already a wall, this hedge may refer to thorns that have grown up and on top of the wall. Once the hedge is gone, the farmer will also tear down the wall, leaving the vineyard exposed. Large and small animals will then come and eat and trample the vines. They will destroy the vineyard and its ability to continue making useless grapes.

### **Isaiah 5:6**

#### **ESV**

I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

**What does Isaiah 5:6 mean?** The owner of the failed vineyard is declaring his intention to destroy it. The vineyard's harvest is valueless and he is done with it. He will tear down the protective barrier that exists and leave the vineyard to the wild animals to decimate (Isaiah 5:5).

Now the owner adds that he will make no attempt to work it any longer. He wants it to become a wasteland. Instead of maintaining the vines, he will intentionally let thorns and weeds grow up and over the existing plants.

Next the farmer says he will tell the clouds not to rain on his vineyard. This reference would have been a strong indicator of exactly who was speaking. That was something only God can do. Did the original audience start to suspect just who this owner was at this point? Or did they just assume he was using hyperbole to express his bitter anger and disappointment?

The next verse (Isaiah 5:7) gives away exactly what Isaiah's song has been about all along, including who the vineyard is meant to represent.

### **Isaiah 5:7**

#### **ESV**

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

**What does Isaiah 5:7 mean?** Isaiah has been telling his audience a song about a vineyard built and cared for by a farmer he calls his "beloved" (Isaiah 5:1). This vineyard fails because the grapes are worthless (Isaiah 5:2). In his disgust, the farmer has declared that he will tear down the protective wall and let the animals devour what remains (Isaiah 5:5). He will also direct the clouds not to rain on the vineyard making the destruction of the vineyard complete (Isaiah 5:6).

The prophet has reached the point in the parable where he openly explains what his song has been about. His "beloved" is none other than the Lord. All along God has been the owner and farmer of this vineyard. And the vineyard is Israel and Judah. The Lord is going through great lengths to ensure the people understand He established His people as His own. They are His vineyard. His desire for them was that of a grape farmer, that his vines would produce good and useful fruit.

Instead, God's people—the vines of the garden—have produced a corrupt and sour crop. At harvest time, the Lord went to look for good deeds bringing Him honor. Instead, He found lawlessness. Instead of honoring the Lord and bringing justice to those who were treated poorly, the Israelites' behaviors were as worthless as sour grapes (Isaiah 3:9–15).

The frustration of the owner of the vineyard represents God's frustration with His people Israel. His plan to leave the vineyard in ruin because of its worthlessness fits with the Lord's plan to leave Israel and Judah a wasteland. The animals who will destroy the vines are the invading armies that will destroy Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kings 24:14).

### **Psalm chapter 80**

**7**Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved! **8**You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. **9**You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. **10**The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. **11**It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. **12**Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? **13**The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. **14**Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, **15**the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. **16**They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face! **17**But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! **18**Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your

name! **19**Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

### Philippians chapter 3

**3**For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— **4**though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5**circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; **6**as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. **7**But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8**Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith — **10**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11**that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

**12**Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. **13**Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15**Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will

### Context Summary

Philippians 3:1–11 warns Christians about the influence of false teachers, particularly those who add legalism on top of the gospel. Paul describes his impressive credentials, showing that he has the right to consider himself "justified" according to the traditional Jewish view. And yet, knowing what he does of Christ, Paul sees all of those accomplishments as garbage. Faith alone saves, and fellowship with Christ is all that truly matters.

### Philippians 3:4

#### **ESV**

though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

**What does Philippians 3:4 mean?** Though Paul identified with those who believe by faith, he had all of the proper Jewish credentials. There was no more qualified individual, in terms of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, than Paul. In other words, if someone were to judge Paul's spirituality on the basis of Judaic requirements, he had the right areas covered. This section is not Paul's attempt to prove his own worth by works. On the contrary, Paul is making that point that nobody can be truly justified by anything other than faith. Even his own impressive resume, expounded in verses 5–6, is not enough.

Paul precedes his laundry list of credentials by noting that his Jewish accomplishments far surpass those of his spiritual opponents, who sought to justify themselves by the law. Yet Paul teaches that these traits are unimportant for those who seek to truly know God. He counts them as "loss" for the sake of Christ (Philippians 3:7). His goal was to know the power of the resurrection and sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:9–10). He had not reached that status yet, but continued to pursue this way of life (Philippians 3:12). Further, Paul called others to imitate his way of life to please God (Philippians 3:17).

### **Philippians 3:5**

#### **ESV**

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;

**What does Philippians 3:5 mean?** Verses 5 and 6 provide a list of seven important traits found in Paul's life as a devout Jew. His reason for listing these is to prove that he, of all people, has the right to comment on the futility of works. Paul is not claiming salvation by faith as an escape attempt. His message is not an excuse for personal failure—that he cannot, or will not, meet some requirement of the Old Testament law. On the contrary, Paul has fulfilled it better than those who criticize him for preaching saving faith!

Paul's birth and ancestry were impeccable, according to Jewish standards. Paul had been circumcised on the eighth day. His parents did this in accordance with God's command given to Abraham (Genesis 17:12). Paul was truly, naturally, of the "people of Israel." In other words, he was born Jewish rather than being a convert to Judaism. Specifically, he was from the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul's training and lifestyle were also perfect, according to Judaism. Paul calls himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews." He was raised according to Jewish customs

and had learned the Hebrew language (Acts 22:2). Paul was a Pharisee, the most religiously conservative group of Jews in his time. Pharisees were known for strictly following Jewish laws and customs. They are particularly noted in the Gospels for their devotion to traditions of the law. They felt that this kept them pure before the Lord. Interestingly, this verse is the only mention of Pharisees outside of the Gospels and Acts.

### **Philippians 3:6**

#### **ESV**

as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

**What does Philippians 3:6 mean?** Paul continues his list of Jewish credentials, begun in verse 5. His purpose is to support his right to preach salvation by faith, instead of by works. Paul met every ritual and legal requirement of Judaism, better than any of his detractors. And yet, he realized that this was not what made him righteous before God: that comes by faith alone.

Here, he mentions his burning passion for Judaism, which led him to brutally persecute Christians before his own conversion. Paul was originally named "Saul," and was infamous for his harassment of the church before being changed by Christ (Acts 9). When he first became a believer, many Christians feared accepting him.

Paul notes also that, according to the Torah and ritual law, he was obedient. He followed the Jewish traditions, and kept himself ritually clean. Very few Jews could make this claim. Even fewer could match all of the claims Paul has listed in these few verses. This is why Paul could say, even to those who thought they had reasons to be confident in their rituals and works, that he had "more" (Philippians 3:4).

All of this sets Paul up for a stark contrast, beginning in verse 7. After noting his human accomplishments, he discards them all as "loss" for the sake of Christ. Regardless of his worldly success, his hope was found in knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and living for Him (Philippians 3:8).

### **Philippians 3:7**

#### **ESV**

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

**What does Philippians 3:7 mean?** Paul's words in this powerful verse include two important phrases. Paul had just mentioned seven important characteristics of his Jewish faith. He adhered to the highest standards of his religion, claiming to have more confidence in the flesh than his opponents (Philippians 3:4). This would be something like a major religious leader today saying "No matter how many degrees I have or accomplishments I have achieved." His human accomplishments had been many, but were considered unimportant in comparison to his relationship with Christ.

The second phrase notes this priority. The contrast between "gain" and "loss" is clear. Paul's human accomplishments, even in the area of religion, were of no value compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus. In fact, he would have gladly traded those for more time, fellowship, and discipleship with Christ. Paul specifically notes the "sake of Christ." He uses this phrase in Philippians 1:29 as well as in 2 Corinthians 12:10 and Philemon 1:6.

### **Philippians 3:8**

#### **ESV**

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

**What does Philippians 3:8 mean?** To Paul, nothing else mattered in comparison to Christ. This included his religion, his family, his career, and his past accomplishments (Philippians 3:5–6). His single goal was Christ. Paul further emphasizes this focus when he notes what he has given up for the sake of the gospel. From Paul's perspective, he had sacrificed all of the worldly accomplishments mentioned in the prior verses. He had left Jerusalem and the temple in exchange for Rome and imprisonment. He had no freedom to travel or to live as he pleased. Yet he thought of those prior glories as "rubbish."

English translations typically use a far more elegant word—such as "dung" or "rubbish,"—than what Paul uses in this phrase. The term Paul wrote is derived from the Greek *skubalon*, used only here in the entire New Testament. The word refers to excrement. Non-biblical sources of that time use it almost exclusively to refer to digestive wastes: feces. Paul's terminology is not vulgar, but it is extremely strong. English terms such as "garbage" don't fully capture the sharpness of this expression.

Most ancient cities had a large, ever-burning pile of waste outside of the community where trash, filth, and garbage were discarded. This, in fact, was the same imagery Jesus used when describing the destiny of the wicked in Matthew 5:22 and 10:28. Christ's term was "Gehenna," the valley used for trash and filth outside of Jerusalem.

In short, Paul is describing his great and noteworthy human achievements using the worst word picture he could share with his audience. All that mattered to Paul was Christ; everything else was not merely less valuable—it was utter garbage.

### **Philippians 3:9**

#### **ESV**

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

**What does Philippians 3:9 mean?** Paul wanted to both "gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8) and "be found in him." These words indicate the idea of receiving and being included with Jesus. Paul realized his works would never be sufficient to cover his sins. Instead, he could only know God by faith in Christ. This is part of Paul's reason for referring to works and rituals as "garbage," as in the prior verse. These things not only cannot save, they can actually impede our walk with Christ. Anything we rely on, or take pride in, more than Christ is a barrier to our fellowship with Him.

In fact, the second part of this verse notes the importance of faith twice. Only faith can make us right with God (Ephesians 2:8–9). Also, Christ gave Paul his faith and his faith depended completely on God. Paul saw no other source for salvation than Jesus. His view reflected that of the apostles, who noted in Acts 4:12 that the name of Jesus was the only way a person could be saved. Jesus Himself taught that He was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

### **Philippians 3:10**

#### **ESV**

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

**What does Philippians 3:10 mean?** Faith in Christ includes sharing in four aspects of Christ's life, which Paul addresses in verses 10 and 11. This verse provides the first three. First, knowing Jesus clearly involves the power of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus conquered death and provided the way to know the Lord.

Second, Paul notes the importance of sharing in "His sufferings." Many believers miss this trait, believing the Christian faith provides freedom from hardship. This is a common—false—teaching of modern motivational speakers who use biblical terminology in their speeches. Both Paul, and the rest of the early church, knew that living for Christ included sharing in both the joys and struggles of Christ. This sometimes means suffering. Paul personally endured hardship despite his faithful life spent serving Christ.

Paul also notes the concept of mimicking Christ in His death. Some see the idea of martyrdom in this verse. However, the focus is on becoming "like him" in death, not the method of death. Paul wants to die to the world of sin and temptation, so he can be fully transformed, in order to be like Christ. This is a sentiment he will mention again in verse 21.

### **Philippians 3:11**

#### **ESV**

that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

**What does Philippians 3:11 mean?** In addition to the three traits Paul gave in verse 10, he adds one additional area to conclude this passage. Paul has already noted one form of resurrection, as well as suffering and death. Here, we find a focus on obtaining resurrection. What did Paul have in mind? Many views have been given regarding what Paul means by this peculiar phrase. The most likely views include either the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50–58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18), or that faithful believers will have a better resurrection in the future than other believers. While these are legitimate points, it is uncertain whether this is Paul's intended meaning in this verse.

The simplest view follows Paul's progression in the previous verse: 1) resurrection (new life in Christ), 2) sufferings, 3) death, 4) and resurrection from the dead (a future reference to the resurrection of the dead). Though this is consistent with the view of the rapture, Paul does not appear to be specific to

the rapture itself in these words and speaks more generally about his future resurrection from the dead.

### **Philippians 3:12**

#### **ESV**

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

**What does Philippians 3:12 mean?** Paul has just spoken about his future death and resurrection with Christ. Someday, he will be made complete and perfect before the Lord (Philippians 3:10–11). He begins a new section in this verse, starting with an important qualifying statement. Paul does not want his readers to think he saw himself as perfect and sinless. He is clear that his life is a work in progress (Romans 7). Paul has not yet been made like Christ, in a resurrected body, and has not yet reached the point of being without sin. This accomplishment is something which only happens when we are perfected in heaven.

Instead of claiming to be perfect now, Paul continues to pursue becoming more like Christ. A Christ-like life is not a moment to achieve, but a goal to pursue. Paul knows he would never be perfect in this world, but instead made it his ambition to become increasingly like Christ in this life.

### **Philippians 3:13**

#### **ESV**

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

**What does Philippians 3:13 mean?** Paul's goal is perfection, but he has not reached it yet. He is not faultless, nor does he expect to achieve perfection before his death. Instead, he uses the analogy of a runner in a race to depict the motivation of his spiritual life. Like a dedicated runner, he has a single goal. Just as a runner cannot be successful unless they concentrate on the race, neither can Paul be successful growing in Christ if he allows other goals to interfere.

Continuing the running analogy, Paul also chooses to live by an important principle: keeping his attention on the road in front of him. A runner cannot look back and still focus on the goal ahead. The two ideas are mutually exclusive. A

runner's goal is to focus on the next step toward his or her goal. Paul's spiritual life is the same. He will not look back to past steps, but focus on improving each step in his race until reaching the goal of being with Christ.

Christians can learn from the past, but we are not bound to the things we have done. Instead of being chained by our past mistakes, we can move forward, knowing that we carry Christ's forgiveness.

### **Philippians 3:14**

#### **ESV**

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**What does Philippians 3:14 mean?** Paul has used the analogy of a runner who focuses on the goal ahead of him. This prevents distractions and stumbling. Paul's spiritual goal is stated directly here: "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

As verse 13 notes, Paul's focus is on forward momentum, not prior mistakes. A person cannot move ahead if their thoughts and vision are focused on the past. Paul has a clear goal: being in heaven with the Lord. He looks forward to the ultimate reward for his faithful service. This prize is to be with Christ, though there is some uncertainty about what he specifically meant, in the context of this remark.

Is this "upward call" a reference to the rapture, or to his death? Paul does not appear to distinguish between these two ideas, at least in this context. He simply writes about the goal of pursuing Christ until he meets with Him after this life. This is a useful focus for believers today as well. The point is not to worry so much about whether we will die first, or if Christ will return. Rather, we should be prepared for whenever and however we meet with Christ. Paul's teaching was to not look back at the past, but instead to focus on what we can do today and in the days ahead to live for Christ until we meet with Him.

## Matthew chapter 21

**33**“Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. **34**When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. **35**And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. **36**Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. **37**Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ **38**But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ **39**And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. **40**When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” **41**They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

**42**Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

**43**Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. **44**And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

**45**When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. **46**And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

### Context Summary

Matthew 21:33–46 begins with another vineyard-related parable from Jesus. This one involves tenants who refused to pay the owner His agreed upon share of the crops. Instead, they mistreated and killed the servants he sent and then killed the owner's son. Jesus compares Israel's religious leaders to these tenants, saying the kingdom of God will be taken from them. Jesus identifies Himself in a psalm about a stone rejected by the builders but chosen by the Lord to be the cornerstone. All who reject Him will fall on the cornerstone or have it fall on and crush them.

### Matthew 21:33

#### ESV

“Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.

**What does Matthew 21:33 mean?** Parables are stories which illustrate important truths. In this chapter of Matthew's gospel, those truths are about ways Israel's religious leaders had failed to obey God. In the previous story, Jesus began by asking for the opinion of His listeners (Matthew 21:28). Here, He starts with a command to listen.

He describes a landowner and master of a household. This man plants a vineyard and then builds the property into something that will produce a profit. He puts a fence around the vineyard to keep out animals and robbers. He equips it with a winepress to process the grapes. He raises a watchtower so servants can look out for potential threats from enemies, thieves, and fire. When all is ready, the landowner leases his well-equipped vineyard to some tenants who will work it while paying him rent. Then he leaves the country.

Jesus has described a very common scenario in Judea and other parts of the world. Wealthy landowners often rented out their land and lived off the rent, sometimes paid in crops. This parable is meant to remind Jesus' Jewish listeners of a familiar Old Testament passage. Isaiah 5:1–7 also describes a metaphorical vineyard. It is said to be the house of Israel and to belong to the Lord. When the product of the vineyard—the people of Israel—turns out to be wild instead of useful, the owner of the vineyard destroys it.

In Jesus' parable, the landowner is once again the Lord and the vineyard is Israel. This time, though, there are tenants who work the vineyard. They are meant to represent Israel's religious leaders. They are charged with tending—caring for, growing—the vines in the field. Jesus' story will show these are not good tenants.

### **Matthew 21:34**

#### **ESV**

When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.

**What does Matthew 21:34 mean?** Jesus is telling another parable about a vineyard. The vineyard in this story has been developed and is leased out by a landowner to some tenants. The landowner moves away to another country. When harvest time comes, he sends a servant to collect his part of the fruit from the farmers renting his vineyard. "His fruit" means his share of the crop. It is the

rent the tenants rightly owe, and would have agreed to, for the use of the vineyard.

This parable shares similarities with a metaphor given to Isaiah by the Lord in Isaiah 5:1–7. As there, the owner of this vineyard is God, and the crop is Israel. Jesus, though, adds tenants to the story. Those tenants represent the Jewish religious leaders, the ones given responsibility for "tending" Israel. In a similar sense, Scripture sometimes refers to spiritual leaders as "shepherds," who are symbolically charged with protecting and guiding a flock of sheep.

In this story, the tenants will not respond well to the owner's attempts to claim what is owed to him.

### **Matthew 21:35**

#### **ESV**

And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

**What does Matthew 21:35 mean?** The owner of a vineyard has rented out his property to some tenants. This would have been a common situation in the ancient middle east. Their agreement was to work the vineyard, caring for the property and the plants, in exchange for a share of the final crop as it is harvested. However, when the owner sends servants to collect his share, the tenants refuse to hand it over. Instead, they beat one of the owner's servants, kill another, and stone a third.

The meaning behind Jesus' parable is clear, in part, because it closely parallels Isaiah 5:1–7. The landowner is the Lord God. The vineyard is Israel. The renters are Israel's leaders, especially her religious leaders. Jesus' description of their treatment of His servants evokes the treatment endured by God's prophets in the Old Testament (Matthew 23:37). Those sent by God to deliver His messages and to demand righteousness from Israel were often persecuted and/or killed by Israel's rulers or citizens (Acts 7:52).

### **Matthew 21:36**

#### **ESV**

Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.

**What does Matthew 21:36 mean?** Jesus is sharing a parable about some renters of a vineyard who refuse to pay their rent to the landowner. Instead of handing over the owner's share of the crops when his servants came to collect it, the tenants beat and kill the servants. When the owner sends another group, the tenants do the same to them.

The renters, or tenants, in the parable represent Israel's religious leaders. Much as a shepherd is responsible for caring for the safety of a flock of sheep (Jeremiah 3:15), or tenants were charged with tending the vineyard, so too were the religious leaders of Israel meant to care for the people. God is the landowner, and, in the following verse, Jesus is the landowner's son.

The depravity of the tenant is increased as the story continues. Not content to reject and kill servants sent by the landowner, they will even try to usurp the position of the landowner's son (Matthew 21:37–38).

### **Matthew 21:37**

#### **ESV**

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

**What does Matthew 21:37 mean?** Isaiah 5:1–7 depicts Israel as a vineyard which fails to produce good fruit, despite the owner's care. As a result, the owner destroys it. Parallel to that, Jesus has been presenting a parable about another vineyard, also representing Israel. This time, the focus is on the men who the landowner charged with caring for the field. The owner rented the well-prepared field (Matthew 21:33–36) to some tenants. Their agreement would have been to give to the landowner a share of each harvest. But when the owner sends servants to collect his share, the tenants beat them and even kill some of them. This parallels Israel's tragic history of prophets being ignored or murdered by religious leaders (Acts 7:52)

Now the owner of the vineyard decides to send his own son to collect the rightly owed crops. He imagines that the tenants will respect his son, though they have killed his servants. Instead, the following verse will show that they see the arrival of the son as an opportunity to defeat the owner of the vineyards once and for all.

**Matthew 21:38****ESV**

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'

**What does Matthew 21:38 mean?** Jesus, in the temple, is telling a parable meant to illustrate the relationship between God the Father and Israel's religious leaders. The nation's leaders are represented by the tenants: renters of a vineyard. God owns the vineyard, which is Israel. He has repeatedly sent servants to collect the rent from the tenants, but they have mistreated and even killed the owner's servants. The servants may be understood as the prophets of old (Acts 7:52; Matthew 23:37).

Now the owner of the vineyard has sent his own son, thinking the tenants will respect him. This is a gracious step, considering that the owner could have responded with violence or revenge of his own. Instead of responding in obedience, the tenants see an opportunity to have the son's inheritance for themselves by killing him. They hope to own the vineyard by eliminating the future rightful heir.

It's important when hearing any parable not to over-analyze the details. Each parable is meant to make a specific point, not to make every detail line up exactly with a precise person or action in the real world. The leaders of Israel were not literally attempting to become God, or to steal the inheritance of His Son. Broadly, Jesus is describing what Israel's leaders have done to God's servants over time and what they are about to do to Himself, God's Son: to reject Him with violence and sin.

**Matthew 21:39****ESV**

And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

**What does Matthew 21:39 mean?** This concludes this parable about wicked tenants and the owner of the vineyard they are responsible to tend. Instead of paying their rent to the owner, in the form of a share of the crops, these tenants have mistreated and killed every servant the owner has sent to collect from them (Matthew 21:33–37). Now the owner has sent his son (Matthew 21:38), and the tenants have thrown him out of the vineyard and killed him, as well. They imagine that with the son dead, they will be able to take his inheritance.

Perhaps Jesus' listeners in the temple do not see it, yet, but His story is meant to show how Israel's religious leaders—including those Jesus is talking to—have failed to tend the vineyard of Israel faithfully. They have mistreated God's prophets, servants sent to collect righteousness from Israel (Acts 7:52), and they will soon kill God's Son (Matthew 17:22–23). Jesus is once again predicting His own death, this time in parable form and to the very men who will condemn Him in the coming days.

The question Christ poses in the following verse will begin to make this plain.

### **Matthew 21:40**

#### **ESV**

When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

**What does Matthew 21:40 mean?** Jesus now asks a question of His listeners about His parable. He has described tenants who refuse to pay the owner of the vineyard their agreed rent. Instead, they have mistreated and killed every servant the owner has sent to collect his share of the crops. They have even killed his son in hopes of taking the inheritance of the vineyard for themselves (Matthew 21:33–39).

The question this raises comes with an obvious answer (Matthew 21:41), but Jesus asks for the sake of emphasis. The answer in the following verse might very well be spoken by one of the chief priests or elders Jesus has been talking to (Matthew 21:23). If so, the answer reveals their own condemnation. Whoever answers is clearly indignant about what these tenants have done to this vineyard owner, as they ought to be. God, as well, has a right to be angry about the way His messengers were mistreated (Matthew 23:37), and those meant to care for Israel wound up abusing her, instead (John 10:12–13).

### **Matthew 21:41**

#### **ESV**

They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

**What does Matthew 21:41 mean?** This reply to a question Jesus asked about His parable (Matthew 21:33–40), shows His story has been effective. He has described some unreasonably wicked tenants who have mistreated and killed the owner's servants when they came to collect rent. The tenants have even killed the owner's son. Jesus asked the crowd what they thought the owner would do when he arrived. Though the response seems obvious, it carries an important message.

This response very likely comes from one of the chief priests or elders or Pharisees to whom Jesus has been talking (Matthew 21:45). If so, the very point of Jesus' parable has been explained through the lips of those who are condemned by it. Not only was Jesus declaring Himself God's Son and predicting His own death at the hands of the "tenants," the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, He was also warning of God's coming judgment on those unrepentant religious leaders.

Whoever answers seems angered about what these evil tenants have done to the owner's servants and son. This person refers to the tenants' deserved fate using an interesting Greek phrase: *kakous kakōs apolesei autous*. That combination literally means something like "he will bring wickedness to those wicked ones," or "the vile ones will be treated vilely." A more concise rendering, such as the ESV, simply says "He will put those wretches to a miserable death."

After purging his land of such evil people, presumably, the landowner will find more suitable tenants. Not only will Israel's religious leaders suffer God's judgment, new "tenants" will step in to help produce a harvest of repentance and righteousness from God's people (Matthew 21:43).

## **Matthew 21:42**

### **ESV**

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

**What does Matthew 21:42 mean?** Jesus once more asks a group of Israel's powerful and well-educated religious leaders if they have ever read a particular passage from the Scriptures. He knows they have, but He asks the rhetorical question to show that they have missed the point of what they have read and studied.

The passage Jesus quotes comes from Psalm 118, one of the psalms used in the Passover season. Jesus is referencing verses 22–23, which are found just before the words used to praise Him as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Psalm 118:25–26; Matthew 21:9). The translation used by Jesus matches that of modern English Bibles. These are words these religious leaders were angry to hear from the crowd, and from the children who later repeated them (Matthew 21:15).

Jesus applies these Old Testament words to Himself. He is the stone the builders rejected. The builders are Israel's leaders, including the chief priests and Pharisees standing near Him. Though rejected by them, the stone, Jesus, has become the cornerstone or "head of the corner," the most important stone in the structure. Prior to modern building techniques, it was extremely difficult to make the ground under a building perfectly level. Instead, whichever corner was lowest would be the location of the strongest, most important stone—which effectively held up the entire structure.

Alternatively, scholars suggest the phrase refers to the final keystone at the top of an arch. The Greek phrase is *kephalēn gōnias*, literally meaning "head of the corner." In either case, it is the stone on which the entire structure ultimately relies on to remain upright.

He adds that this is the Lord's doing, meaning that the rejection by merely human leaders could never have stopped it. More than that, it is "marvelous in our eyes." Jesus taking His place as the Messiah is ultimately a beautiful and pleasing work of God and not something engineered by any group of human beings.

### **Matthew 21:43**

#### **ESV**

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

**What does Matthew 21:43 mean?** This states, directly, what the parable of the tenants in the vineyard said indirectly (Matthew 21:33–41). Christ tells the chief priests and Pharisees standing in front of Him in the temple that the kingdom of God will be taken from them.

Israel's leaders had held a powerful position on earth for centuries. Israel was God's chosen people, and He dealt with His people most directly through the leaders who were meant to guide them to obedience and righteousness and

trust in Him. Those leaders, though, had failed for far too long, rejecting God's prophetic messengers (Acts 7:52). Now they had even rejected God's own Son, Jesus, as the Messiah. The result would be that the leaders of Israel would lose the role of tending the vineyard of God's people on earth.

Instead, Jesus says, the kingdom of God will be given to a people who will produce the fruit of righteousness and obedience to Him. Commentators disagree on whether Jesus is referring explicitly to moving the focus of God's relationship with humanity from Israel to the church, made up of all who trust in Jesus alone for their salvation. The church begins with the twelve apostles and grows for a time as an apparent extension of Judaism before eventually becoming a mostly Gentile movement. What all agree on is that Jesus will now be the dividing line between those who are the people of God and those who are not. All who would belong to God must come through Jesus, the cornerstone.

### **Matthew 21:44**

#### **ESV**

And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

**What does Matthew 21:44 mean?** Jesus has quoted from Psalm 118:25–26 and has applied it to Himself. He is the stone that the builders of Israel, her leaders, rejected. The Lord, however, has made Jesus the cornerstone of the house of God (Matthew 21:42–43).

Now Jesus references Isaiah 8:14–15. Those who do not accept Him as the cornerstone will be broken or crushed by it. Isaiah put it this way, "And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."

In other words, those who do not come to God by way of the cornerstone Jesus will be broken by the cornerstone Jesus (John 3:16–18). It is impossible to go around (John 14:6). All must go through Him to reach the Father or reject Him and be crushed (John 3:36).

**Matthew 21:45****ESV**

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

**What does Matthew 21:45 mean?** This conversation began when some chief priests and elders approached Jesus with a question about the source of His authority (Matthew 21:23). Now Matthew shows that some Pharisees were present, as well—at least they had arrived by the time Jesus finished these two parables.

Instead of finding ammunition to use against Jesus, though, He had forced them to back down since they were unwilling to publicly say that John the Baptist was not sent from God (Matthew 21:25–27). Jesus launched from this into two parables that thoroughly condemned these Jewish religious leaders. He had indirectly owned His own role as the Son of God, predicting both His own death and God's coming judgment of these Israelite leaders (Matthew 21:28–41).

Now Matthew adds a note to let his readers know that the chief priests and Pharisees understood that Jesus was talking about them all along. They grasped that He was condemning them and predicting that the kingdom would be taken from them. It's not surprising that they were looking for a way to arrest Jesus and stop Him from teaching these things.

**Matthew 21:46****ESV**

And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

**What does Matthew 21:46 mean?** Jesus knew He would be rejected, condemned, and executed in the coming days (Matthew 17:22–23). For now, however, He was enormously popular among the people in Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–11). A cowardly lust for power, even at the cost of truth, kept Jewish religious leaders from arresting Jesus immediately. Above all, the chief priests had become politicians. They could not afford to lose the support of the people. For the time being, the people believed Jesus to be a legitimate prophet from God. Some apparently believed Him to be the Messiah.

These beliefs would not last the week for most Israelites, but the chief priests and Pharisees knew that if they arrested Jesus now, they would be seen as standing against God's man. Ironically, this is exactly what they were doing.