

The Parables of the Vineyard and the Marriage Feast (part 2 in a 4 part study)

In dealing with the parable of the Vineyard, the first point of consistency and harmony requires matching the vineyard with a group a people who comprise the kingdom of God (v43). Is there a group that matches such a description? Of course! It is the nation of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant; described by God on several occasions as His vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 12:10). However, in Jesus day, that nation was represented by the religious ruling class. In the larger context of Matthew 21, beginning in v23, Jesus enters the temple and engages in a confrontation with those very religious leaders. The interaction continues throughout the end of the vineyard story, as indicated in Matthew 21:45; where the chief priests/elders correctly conclude that the parable is about them. Why?

It is due to the brilliance of the parable itself. In a manner eerily similar to that of Nathan's parable in confronting King David (2 Samuel 12:1-15), Christ elicits the conclusion from the rulers (v41), which serves as their indictment. In order to support His verdict from Scripture, Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 (v42). He then issues His sentence upon them and the nation as a whole in vv43-44 –

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

No wonder the rulers understand that the parable is about them and even desire to act upon this realization by fulfilling their portrayal in it (vv45-46). The definitive application by our Lord in vv42-44, enables us to interpret the parable of the Vineyard just as clearly and accurately as those religious leaders did. It was designed to teach them and us about the nation of Israel and her **rejection** of the promised Messiah. The guilt of their rejection would bring God's judgment upon the nation, not only in its physical destruction by the Roman army in A.D. 70; but in its **replacement** as God's chosen instrument for fulfilling His purposes in our world. That replacement would involve the creation of a new spiritual entity, on the day of Pentecost, known as the Church (Acts 2:1-42; cf. Matthew 16:16-19). It would serve as a new beginning in the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption.

So after such a compelling and convicting denunciation of Israel's unbelief, why would Christ immediately repeat Himself in another lengthy parable about a marriage feast? He wouldn't. The parable recorded in Matthew 22:1-14 would serve the purpose of a necessary follow-up to that of Matthew 21:33-40. It would answer the question of what the “replacement” would be. Before we consider those details, an equally important question must first be answered. Would Israel's replacement in the redemptive plan of God be permanent?