

Matthew 21

This chapter begins the last week of Jesus' life on earth until His resurrection. Jesus was in Jericho at the end of chapter 20; it was about 15 miles to Jerusalem from here. We include here a chart of the likely events, from Matthew, which occurred during that week.

Sunday	Matthew 21:1-11, 17		Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before Passover: John 12:1.
Monday	Matthew 21:12-13, 18-22		
Tuesday	Matt. 21:23-22:46; chapters 24 & 25		
Wednesday	Matt. 26:14-16 (?)		
Thursday	Matt. 26:17-46		
Friday	Matt. 26:47-75; 27:1-66	Crucifixion from 9 AM to 3 PM	
Saturday	Jesus in hades; Paradise		
Sunday	Matt. 28:1-20		

The King arrives in the city of Jerusalem (21:1-11), but not on a war horse, a stallion, but on a donkey's foal. This illustrates His humility and it puts a lie to the accusation that Jesus intended to incite Israel, as a king, against the nation of Rome. Following that symbolic event, Jesus drives money-changers out of His Father's house (21:12-17). Driving the money-changers out of the temple indicated a judgment on the temple and its occupants. The cursing of the fig tree (21:18-22) was an object lesson with the same message.

The antagonism between Jesus and the Jewish leadership reaches a crescendo when Jesus is crucified on Friday. In this chapter, the leaders ask Jesus about His source of authority (perhaps referring to Him driving out the money-changers or healing the blind and lame, or referring to His whole life and teaching): 21:23-27. In order to answer His critics, Jesus gives three parables, one illustrating the repentance of the sincere (21:28-32), one illustrating the judgment on the impenitent (21:33-46), and one illustrating the grace of God (22:1-14).

TRANSLATION - 21:1-11:

1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and they came into Bethphage unto the Mount of Olives; at that time Jesus sent two disciples **2** saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey having been tied and a colt with her; After loosing, bring [them] to me. **3** And if anyone may ask you something, say that 'The Lord has need of them.' And immediately he will send them."

4 And this has been done in order that the word may be fulfilled through the prophet saying, **5** "Say to the daughters of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you humble and having sat on a donkey and on the colt, the son of a beast of burden.'"

6 And after going, the disciples, and doing just as Jesus ordered them, **7** they brought the donkey and the colt and they put on them the garments, and He sat on them. **8** And the large crowd spread for themselves the garments in the way, and others cut branches from the trees and spread in the way. **9** And the crowds, those preceding Him and those following cried

out saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed [is] the one coming in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”

10 And after them entering into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up saying, “Who is This One?” **11** And the crowds were saying, “This One is the prophet Jesus, the One from Nazareth of Galilee.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Jerusalem” (ver. 1) has been mentioned beginning in 2:1, 3. The last mention is at 20:17-18. “Bethphage” is found here; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29. “Olives” is found 15 times; in Matthew at 21:1; 24:3; 26:30. For the word “disciple,” see at 5:1. “Village” (ver. 2) is found 27 times in the NT, the first at 9:35. “Donkey” is found three times here (21:2, 5, 7); Luke 13:15; John 12:15. “Colt” is found more frequently, twelve times in the NT; only here in Matthew.

This word for “word” (ver. 4) is used 1,024 times, first at 1:22. It is not the better known word *logos* but actually a participle form of the verb “to speak.” “Daughter” (ver. 5) is found 28 times in the NT; in Matthew, first at 9:18, 22. “Zion” is a poetic term for Jerusalem, referring more specifically to the mountainous plateau on which the city was built. “Zion” is found 7 times in the NT: Matt. 21:5; John 12:15; Rom. 9:33; 11:26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 14:1. For the word “king,” see at 1:6. “Humble” can be translated “meek, gentle, or unassuming.” It is found in 5:5; 11:29; 21:5; 1 Peter 3:4. “Having sat” is found at Acts 20:18; 21:2, 4; 25:1; 27:2. “Beast of burden” is only found here and at 2 Peter 2:16.

“To order” (ver. 6) means to “command.” It is only used in Matthew: 21:6; 26:19; 27:10. “Garment” is a generic term; it is used 60 times in the NT, first at 5:40. “To cut” (ver. 8) was used first at 11:17. “Branches” was first seen at 13:32. “Trees” was first seen at 3:10.

“To follow” (ver. 9) is often used for disciples; it was first used at 4:20, 22. “To cry” or to “cry out” was first seen at 8:29; 9:27. “Hosanna” is used here (ver. 9, 15); Mark 11:9-10; John 12:13. “Son of David” is used 33 times in the Bible; it was first seen at 1:1. It is a Messianic title. “To bless” was first seen at 14:19. “Name” was first seen at 1:21, 23. “Highest” is used 13 times in the Bible; only here in Matthew. “To stir up” or “to shake” (ver. 10) is used here; 27:51; 28:4; Heb. 12:26; Rev. 6:13. It gives us the English word *seismic*. “Prophet” was used first at 1:22. “Nazareth” is used only here in Matthew. It is used 5 other times: Luke 1:26; 2:4, 39, 51; Acts 10:38. “Galilee” was seen first at 2:22.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

“Having sat” (ver. 5) translates a verb in the perfect tense, indicating a settled state, probably portraying Jesus as having been coronated king.

PARALLELS:

Mark’s parallel is found in 11:1-11; Luke’s, in 19:28-38; John’s, in 12:12-19.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

“Daughters of Zion” (ver. 5) is a poetic description of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The phrase is used 30 times in the OT; “Zion” alone is used 156 times. See especially Isaiah 62:11. Solomon rides on a mule to his coronation in 1 Kings 1:33, 38, 44. “Hosanna” echoes Psalm 118:25-26, the last of the Hallel psalms. “Hallel” designates psalms that begin and typically end with “Hallelujah” - “Praise to Jehovah!”

Zechariah 14:4 pictured the Messiah standing on the Mount of Olives. Many scholars want to make Zechariah 14 portray a millennial kingdom but the context of Zechariah 9-14 is often alluded to (such as 9:9 in verse 2) and quoted as being fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Jesus; in other words, referring to His first coming. There is no textual support to apply Zechariah 14 to the second coming of Christ. Genesis 49:10-11 pictures the Messiah / King coming from the tribe of Judah.

Citations of Zechariah	in Matthew
9:9	21:4-9
14:21	21:12-13
11:12	26:15-16
9:11	26:26-29
13:7	26:30-35
11:12-13	27:3-10
14:4-5	27:51-53

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The location of “Bethphage” (ver. 1) is not known today but it is believed to have been about 1 mile from Jerusalem, on the east side of the Mount of Olives. “Mount of Olives” (ver. 1) is found 12 times in the Bible; in the OT at 2 Samuel 15:30; Zechariah 14:4. The rest are in the NT, with the final mention at John 8:1. “Jerusalem” had a population of about 70,000 during the year, apart from holidays. For the Feast of Passover, the number could swell to 250,000.

COMMENTS:

Jesus had told His disciples as early as 16:21 as well as 20:17-18 that He had to go to Jerusalem to be killed and to raise again. Since that point, He has been moving toward Jerusalem (cf. 19:1). Now, He has arrived. This chapter is the beginning of the so-called “Passion Week,” *passio* being a transliteration of the Latin word for “suffering.” Jesus arrived in Bethphage on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, outside of Jerusalem. From there, He sent a couple disciples into a nearby village (we do not know which one), to find a donkey and its foal. He needs them for His entry into Jerusalem. Jesus has been on foot, as far as we know, since He left Capernaum. Yet, the last couple miles will be on a donkey, both to portray Himself as the King of the Jews, as well as to illustrate His humility, in not riding on a horse. Jesus anticipated the donkey owner or caretaker asking why they needed the animals; the disciples’ response was to be: “The Lord needs them.” We have no record of Jesus talking to the owner or caretaker beforehand but apparently He did. At least the owner recognized the designation “Lord.” Immediately, He sent the animals for Jesus’ use.

Matthew writes that this event fulfilled two passages of Scripture: Isaiah 62:11 but especially Zechariah 9:9. This latter passage pictures the king of Israel riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the king being characterized by humility. He did not enter the city on a war horse but on a “beast of burden,” a donkey. The disciples did just as Jesus had said and then laid garments on the foal of the donkey and Jesus sat on “them.” Obviously the word “them” refers to the garments, on the foal, not to the foal and the donkey since it would be physically impossible for Jesus to ride both animals at once.

The crowd, excited by the appearance of the great miracle-working prophet, was ecstatic! They spread their own garments on the road, laying out a “red carpet” for the coming King. Others also cut down branches and strewed them across the road (see 2 Kings 9:13). Palm branches symbolized nationalism and victory for the Jews. It appears that the whole crowd, from the beginning of the procession until the end, sang the “Hallel” songs (Psalms 113-118), typically sang during the Passover Feast but especially appropriate on this occasion.

Their song stated, "Save us! Son of David! Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord! Save us in the highest!" Jesus uses the phrase as well in 23:39.

Jesus finally enters Jerusalem in verse 10, where we see Jerusalem "shaken" at Jesus' appearance. It had also been disturbed at His birth, in 2:3. The crowds were asking one another, "Who is This one?" Some believed they had the answer: "The Prophet, the One from Nazareth of Galilee" (see 26:71; Mark 1:24; 10:47; 16:6; Luke 4:34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45; 18:5, 7; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9). That sounds like many in Jerusalem had heard and knew Jesus. Indeed, John mentions several appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem before His final week. Jesus identifies Himself as a prophet in 13:57; see also 16:14; 21:46.

APPLICATION:

Jesus has emphasized the beauty and need for humility in Matthew 5:5; 12:18-21; 18:1-4; 19:13-15; 21:5; 23:12. Matthew has been showing since 1:1 that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah, the King of the Jews. Jesus chooses to enter Jerusalem in one sense, as a king, but unique king, an humble king.

TRANSLATION - 21:12-17:

12 And Jesus entered into the temple and cast out all those selling and buying in the temple, and the tables of the money-changers He overturned and the chairs of the sellers of doves. **13** And He said to them, "It has been written, 'My house a house of prayer it will be called; but you yourselves are making it a den of thieves.'"

14 And they brought to Him blind and lame in the temple, and He healed them. **15** And after seeing, the chief priests and the scribes, the wonderful things which He did and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. **16** And they said to Him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Did you never read that 'Out of the mouth of babies and nursing ones, you have prepared praise?'" **17** And after leaving them, He departed out of the city into Bethany and spent the night there.

GREEK WORDS:

"Temple" (ver. 12) was seen first at 4:5. It is used 72 times in the NT. "To sell" was first seen at 10:29. "To buy" was first seen at 13:44, 46. It is related to the word for "market." "Tables" was seen first at 15:27. "Money-changers" is seen here, Mark 11:15, John 2:15. "To overturn" is seen here and Mark 11:15. "Chairs" is used here; Matt. 23:2; Mark 11:15. "Dove" was first seen at 3:16; 10:16.

"House" (ver. 13) is used 114 times, first at 9:6-7. "Prayer" is used here for the first time in Matthew (also at 21:22). It is used 36 times in the NT. "Cave" or "hideout" is used here; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 11:38; Heb. 11:38; Rev. 6:15. "Thieves" or "robbers" or "bandits" is used 15 times; in Matthew here; 26:55; 27:38, 44. Jesus healed the blind in 9:27-28; 11:5; 12:22; 15:14, 30-31; 20:30. He healed the "lame" at 11:5; 15:30-31; 18:8. "To heal" is used first at 4:23-24.

"Wonderful things" (ver.15) is one word, related to the verb "to wonder." It is only used here in the NT. "To be indignant" was used first, relative to the apostles, in 20:24. It is also used at 26:8 in Matthew. "To read" (ver. 16) was first seen at 12:3. "Babies" was first seen at 11:25. "Nursing ones" translates a participle; it is used here; 24:19; Mark 13:17; Luke 11:27; 21:23. "To prepare" or to "make" or to "create" was seen first at 4:21. This is the last use in Matthew. "Praise" is an unusual word, only used twice; here and Luke 18:43.

"Bethany" (ver. 17) is used here; 26:6 and 10 other times in the Gospel accounts. "To spend the night" is one word in Greek. It is used at Matt. 21:17; Luke 21:37.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verb "it has been written" (ver. 13) in the perfect tense is used by biblical writers to emphasize the continuing relevance of the OT Scriptures.

PARALLELS:

This event has its parallels at Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22. Many scholars believe the John 2 event is the same event as this one, set out of chronological order by John. It could also be very possible that Jesus performed the same action on two occasions, separated by a three-year gap.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Pigeons were used by the poor in their sacrifices: Lev. 5:7; 12:8; 14:22; 15:14, 29 (see Luke 2:24). The citation by Jesus in verse 13 is a composite of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Isaiah lived during the Assyrian siege and Jeremiah, during the Babylonian siege. Their words are appropriate also in Jesus' day even though the "siege" has turned from a physical to a spiritual assault. It should also be noted that according to Leviticus 21:17-18, Aaron's descendants who were blind or lame could not serve at the altar. These, in Jesus' day, were not priests but they were healed in the temple complex which suggests a reversal of the Mosaic legislation. Psalm 8 is used elsewhere in the NT at 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:6-9; 1 Pet. 3:22. Zechariah 14:21 might be in view in this text.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The temple had an outer court, the Court of the Gentiles (where these events likely take place), and then an inner court, the Court of Women. The next court, the Court of the Israelites, was the location of the altar for sacrifices. The inner temple was the Court of the Priests, where only priests could enter. The temple itself, the largest building in the Roman world, was 1,590' (W) by 1,035' (N), by 1,536' (E), by 912' (S), with an area the size of 35 football fields. It covered 1/6 of the total area of Jerusalem itself.

As we noted in 17:27, Rome had separate coinage than the Jews used. Their currency had to be exchanged so they could pay the required temple tax (Exo. 30:11-16; see also Matt. 17:24-27) or to buy animals for sacrifice, which was allowed under the Law. Doves were often sacrificed by the poor.

"Bethany" was the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (John 12:1). Perhaps Jesus spent the night with them. Bethany was a couple miles from Jerusalem, and as with Bethphage, it was on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives.

COMMENTS:

Jesus entered into the temple; He could not have entered the holy place as He was not from the family of Levi. However, He did enter the temple complex, where some were exchanging money and selling sacrifices (see Deut. 14:24-25). Perhaps they were charging exorbitant amounts, or in some other way were being dishonest with their efforts. Or, perhaps, their business should have been done outside the temple complex. Jesus rebuked them, citing Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 to the effect that His Father's house (cf. Luke 2:49), should be a house for prayer. These men had made it a den or hideout for thieves. This rebuke foreshadows the rebuke of the entire city of Jerusalem and its subsequent destruction, including the temple itself, which Jesus will predict in chapter 23.

Once again Jesus spends time healing the sick, the blind and the lame. This is the only miracle Jesus performs in the temple and it is the last healing Jesus performs in Matthew. If there needed to be evidence of His authority to do what He did (see verse 23), this was it. If there needed to be evidence that He was the Messiah, this was it. But when one is prejudiced, as the scribes and chief priests and Pharisees (and Sadducees) were, then evidence is pushed aside. From this point, the "chief priests" are mentioned 17 times in Matthew!

The chief priests and scribes saw the marvelous works He was doing and rather than accepting His claims, calls on Him to rebuke the children who were imitating the adults: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The chief priests and scribes were indignant that these children were acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. Yet Jesus responded, asking if they had ever read

Psalms 8:2, "Out of the mouths of babies and nursing ones you have prepared praise!" These children were simply fulfilling the anticipation of the psalmist.

Jesus left the critics, the temple, and the city and returned to the village of Bethany and spent the night there.

APPLICATION:

The house of worship should, even under the terms of the New Covenant, still be a house of prayer. It ought to be a place where Christians can seek refuge from a hostile and critical world, where they can come together in peace, harmony, unity, love and sing praises to God through Jesus, to pray together, give from their earnings, study the Word together, and commune through the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day. In this sense, we ought to continue imitating the children from this text and sing praises to the Creator and Redeemer, "Save us, Son of David!"

TRANSLATION - 21:18-22:

18 And early in the morning He returned into the city being hungry. **19** And seeing one fig tree on the way, He went to it and nothing He found in it except leaves alone, and said to it, "No longer from you fruit will be forever." And the fig tree withered up immediately.

20 And seeing, the disciples marveled saying, "How immediately did the fig tree wither up?" **21** And after answering, Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not hesitate, not only you may do to the fig tree, but even to this mountain you may say, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea!' It will happen. **22** And all whatever you may ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

GREEK WORDS:

"Being hungry" (ver. 18) was used at 4:2; 5:6. "Fig tree" (ver. 19) is used in this context in Matthew and 24:32. It is found 16 times total in the NT. "Leaf" is found 6 times: Matt. 21:19; 24:32; Mark 11:13; 13:28; Rev. 22:2. "To wither" was used first at 13:6. "Immediately" is used 18 times, only here in Matthew (21:19-20). "To marvel" (ver. 20) was used at 8:10, 27.

"Faith" (ver. 21) was used first at 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29. "To hesitate" or to "doubt" was used first at 16:3. "Prayer" was seen at verse 13 above. "To believe," related to the noun "faith" is used first at 8:13; 9:28; 18:6. It is used several times in this context: 21:22, 25, 32.

PARALLELS:

This event is paralleled in Mark 11:12-14, 20-24. Jesus compares faith to a mustard seed also in Matthew 17:20.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

A barren fig tree symbolized a disobedient Israel in the OT: Jer. 8:13; 24:8; 29:17; Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:12; Micah 7:1. See also Romans 11:8, 25.

COMMENTS:

It appears this particular morning (Monday morning), Jesus had not eaten breakfast. He was very hungry. He saw a fig tree and expected to find some early figs. The leaves would appear first, afterward, the fruit. So, Jesus did something He had never done before - He miraculously cursed. He cursed the fig tree so that fruit would no longer grow on it. It had been deceptive and deception violates the truthful nature of God. The tree withered up.

The disciples marveled that the fig tree withered so quickly at the curse of the Son of God. As Jesus had done in Matthew 17:20, He challenged His disciples' quality of faith and what they would do with it. He promised His followers that if they had faith, even as small as a grain of mustard seed, and did not doubt or hesitate, they could say to a mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea," and it would be done. This whole saying is a proverb. Jesus does not have a specific mountain in mind nor a specific sea. He just wants His followers

to trust Him and live by that trust (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Jesus continues: "All, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." What a tremendous promise of prayer!

APPLICATION:

The gift of prayer is one of the most loved and closely-held blessings available to Christians. Compare John 14:12-14 for Jesus' promise about answering prayers. See also 1 Peter 3:12; James 1:6; 1 John 5:14-15. If one does not have trust in God or trust in the Messiah, he or she will have no trust in prayer. For other passages dealing with faith, see 17:19-20; Luke 17:6; Rom. 4:20; 1 Cor. 13:2; Eph. 3:20; James 1:6.

We also note that fruitfulness is important in one's walk with Christ. Jesus (and John) have emphasized producing fruit frequently: 3:8, 10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:23. Jesus will give a further lesson on bearing fruit in John 15 where the people of the Messiah are pictured in terms ("vineyard") reminiscent of the OT nation of Israel.

TRANSLATION - 21:23-27:

23 And His after coming into the temple, they approach Him, teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people saying, "By what authority these things do you do? And who to You gave this authority?"

24 And after answering, Jesus said to them, "I will tell you even I, one word, whatever you all say to Me even I to you, I will say by what authority these things I do. **25** The immersion of John, from whence was it? From heaven or from men?" And those were discussing among themselves, saying, 'If we may say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why therefore did you not believe him?' **26** But if we may say, 'From men,' we fear the crowd, for all as a prophet they hold John."

27 And after answering Jesus they said, "We do not know." He said to them even Himself, "Neither I myself say to you by what authority these things I do."

GREEK WORDS:

For the verb "to teach" (ver. 23), see 4:23. On "chief priests" and "people," see 1:21; 2:4. On "elders" of Israel, see at 15:2. "Authority" was used in 7:29; 8:9. On "immersion" (ver. 25), see at 3:7. This is the only other time the word is used in Matthew. "To discuss" is used at 16:7-8. This is the only other time it is used in Matthew. "To fear" (ver. 26) was first seen at 1:20.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

"They were discussing" (ver. 25) is a verb in the imperfect tense, suggesting continuous action in the past.

PARALLELS:

For another parable related to vineyards, see 20:1.

COMMENTS:

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, He made the statement that He is greater than the temple (12:6). The chief priests and elders are indignant that they cannot stop neither Jesus nor the crowds' positive response to Him. In this text, they challenge His authority: "By what authority these things do you do?" They refer, perhaps, to driving out the money changers, perhaps to the teachings He has been giving, perhaps to healing the lame in the temple complex, perhaps all of these and more. "And who to you gave this authority?"

Jesus responded, as rabbis often did, with a question of His own: "The immersion of John, from whence was it? From heaven or from men?" This was a simple question. Uninspired men simply do not call on others to repent of their sins! It is far more advantageous and profitable in man's world to tell people what they want to hear and encourage them in their own path.

Matthew, miraculously, gives us insight into their deliberations. If they answered “from heaven,” they knew Jesus would challenge them to obey John’s preaching (see 3:8-10), including John’s message about Jesus (see John 1:29). They could not afford, theologically, to give that answer! But, if they answered as their heart led them, “from men,” they feared the common Jew who held John as a prophet. The answer was simple but prejudice dictated that they respond, “We do not know.” That is a perfectly cowardly response.

Jesus, then, refused to play their game and refused to answer their question. The answer, truly, was in front of their very eyes.

APPLICATION:

The chief priests and scribes were correct in asking about authority. There is nothing wrong with questioning one’s authority. We must obey Jesus’ authority in order to be saved (Heb. 5:8-9). Their problem was that they did not want to accept the answer.

The wise man warned that we should not “answer a fool according to his folly” (Prov. 26:4). Some questions do not need to be answered, if the questioner is prejudiced and intends to use the answer maliciously. Consider these texts: 1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9. We also ought to be careful and be humble toward the word of God and accept whatever the Scriptures teach us and not try to twist passages if they clearly teach something we have not believed before (see 2 Peter 3:14-16).

TRANSLATION - 21:28-32:

28 But what do you think? A man was having two children. And after going to the first, he said, “Child, go today, work in the vineyard.” **29** And after answering, he said, “I do not desire.” But later, changing his mind, he went. **30** And after going to the other, he said likewise. And after answering he said, “I [will], sir,” and he did not go. **31** Which from the two did the will of the father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are preceding you into the kingdom of God. **32** For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him; but you yourselves seeing neither changed your mind after to believe him.”

GREEK WORDS:

“To think” (ver. 28) or “to suppose” was first used at 3:9; 6:7. “Vineyard” was first seen in chapter 20 (20:1, 2, 4, 7-8) and here (21:28, 33, 39-41) in Matthew. “To change one’s mind” (ver. 29) is used here (21:29, 32); Matt. 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21. “Will” (ver. 31) was first seen at 6:10; 7:21. “Tax collector” was first seen at 5:46. This is the first and only use of “prostitute” in Matthew. The word is found 12 times in the NT, five times in Revelation (17:1, 5, 15-16; 19:2). Matthew uses “kingdom of God” only four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). He prefers “kingdom of heaven,” 32 times. “Righteousness” was used first at 3:15.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

For OT passages picturing Israel as a vineyard, see Isaiah 5:17; Psalm 80:8-9; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 17:6-7; 15:1-6; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The manuscripts have three variations of this parable. According to the *Textual Commentary*, the version we have translated (from the Greek UBS⁴ text) is the likeliest reading.

COMMENTS:

As a response to the chief priests and scribes, for not answering His question, Jesus gives three parables: 21:28-32; 21:33-46; 22:1-14. In this first parable, Jesus challenges them: “What do you think?” A man had two children, two sons. To the first, the man told him to work in his vineyard. The young man said bluntly, “I will not.” Yet, he changed his mind and went.

To the second, the man told him to work in the vineyard and he was equally, but positively, plain: “I, Lord.” Yet, he changed his mind and did nothing. So, Jesus challenges His antagonists: “Who from the two did the will of the Father?” As with His previous question, the answer is simple, which they answer correctly: “The first.”

Then Jesus drives home the point: “Truly I say to you, that the tax collectors and prostitutes are preceding you into the kingdom of God.” These men thought they had the “fast track” to heaven because of their religiosity and spirituality. However, that was only superficial. Jesus had asked them about John; speaking of John, he came to them in the “way of righteousness.” Thus, Jesus answered for them His own question: John’s authority was from heaven! Yet, they did not believe his preaching and respond to it (see 3:8-10). However, the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe his preaching! They repented of their sins and they were restored into a relationship with Jehovah God. Instead of following their example, the chief priests and scribes did not repent of their sins nor believe in his message.

APPLICATION:

Some scholars believe the contrast between the two sons is between Jews believing on Jesus and Gentiles believing on Jesus. That, however, is not the point of the passage. The parable pictures people who are outwardly religious but inwardly self-centered and self-serving who, consequently, miss entering heaven. People who appear outwardly as sinners and despised often are those who are sincere in their hearts and obey Jesus’ commandments and enter heaven, even though they are despised by the world. Christians ought to be careful judging by outward appearances (see James 2:1-13).

TRANSLATION - 21:33-46:

33 Another parable, hear... A man was a householder who planted a vineyard and a hedge to it he set around and he dug in it a winepress and built a tower and he hired farmers and traveled. **34** But when arrived the time of the fruit, he sent his servants to the farmers to receive his fruit. **35** And the farmers, taking his servants, some they beat, and some they killed, and some they stoned. **36** Again he sent other servants more than the first, and they did to them likewise.

37 And finally, he sent to them his son, saying, “They will respect my son.” **38** But the farmers, seeing the son, said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and we will have his inheritance.’ **39** And after taking him, they cast outside the vineyard and they killed [him].

40 Therefore, whenever may come the lord of the vineyard, what will he do to those farmers?”

41 They said to Him, “Evil severely he will destroy them and the vineyard he will rent to other farmers, those will deliver to him the fruit in their time.”

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the writings, ‘The stone which they rejected the builders, this became the head of the corner? From the Lord this happened and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”

43 On account of this, I say to you that it will be taken away from you the kingdom of God and it will be given to Gentiles, making its fruit. [**44** And the one falling on the stone, this one will be crushed; on whomever it may fall, it will grind him.]

45 And after hearing, the chief priests and Pharisees, His parable, they knew that concerning them He said [it]. **46** And seeking Him to seize they feared the crowd, since for a prophet they held Him.

GREEK WORDS:

“Hedge” (ver. 33) or “fence” is used here; Mark 12:1; Luke 14:23; Eph. 2:14. “To dig” is used here; 25:18; Mark 12:1. “Winepress” is used here; Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15. “To build” is related to the word for “house.” It was used first at 7:24, 26. “Tower” is used here; Mark 12:1;

Luke 13:4; 14:28. "To hire" is used here (21:33, 41); Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9. "Farmers" is used 19 times in the NT; in Matthew only in this context (21:33-35, 38, 40-41). "To journey" is used here; 25:14-15; Mark 12:1; Luke 15:13; 20:9.

"To beat" (ver. 35) is used only here in Matthew; it is used in the NT 15 times. "To kill" was used first at 10:28; 14:5. "To stone" or "to pelt with stones" is used here; 23:37; Luke 13:34; Acts 7:58-59; 14:5; Heb. 12:20. "To respect" (ver. 37) is used only here in Matthew, out of 9 uses in the NT. "Heir" (ver. 38) is used only here in Matthew, out of 15 uses. "Inheritance" is used 14 times; this is its only use in Matthew.

"Evil" (ver. 41) is used here first in Matthew; also at 24:48; 27:23. It is used 50 times in the NT. "Severely" was used first at 4:24; 8:16; 9:12. "To destroy" was used first at 2:13. "To deliver" or "to pay back" was used first at 5:26, 33. "Stone" (ver. 42) is used first in 3:9. "To be rejected" is found 9 times, only here in Matthew. "Builder," actually the participle form of the verb "to build" was first seen at 7:24, 26. "Head" was used first at 5:36; 6:17. "Corner" was used first at 6:5. "Marvelous" is used 6 times: Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:11; John 9:30; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 15:1, 3.

"To crush" (ver. 44) is used here and Luke 20:18. "To grind" is used only here and Luke 20:18. For "Pharisees" (ver. 46), see 3:7. For "parable," see 13:3. For "to seek," see 2:13. For "to seize," see 9:25. For "to fear," see 1:20.

PARALLELS:

Jesus has cited Psalm 118:25-26 at 21:9, 15. It is also referenced in Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7 (see also Isaiah 8:14; 28:16). For other passages in Matthew where Israel is judged, see: 3:7-10; 8:11-12; 12:38-42; 13:10-17; 15:1-9; 16:5-12.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Prophets were stoned by their fellow Jews in 2 Chronicles 24:19-22 (see also Matthew 23:31-33, 37) and beaten (Jeremiah 20:2), sawn in two (Heb. 11:37; believed to have been Isaiah), and killed (Jer. 26:21-23). See also Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15. For passages in the OT where God's spokesmen were mistreated, by their own people, see: 1 Kings 18:13; 22:24-27; 2 Kings 6:31; 21:16; 2 Chron. 16:15-16; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 7:25-26; 37:15; 44:4.

The "stone" passages are Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Jesus fully illustrates to us the process of creating a vineyard from the first century. One trough was dug on a slightly higher elevation than the lower trough. They were either hewn out of rock or lined with rock and coated with plaster. These troughs would be 1-2' deep. The men would "trample" on the grapes in the upper trough so the juice would flow into the lower trough. Then it was put into wineskins which we saw back in 9:17-18. The time of trampling grapes was a time of celebration and joy.

The phrase "cornerstone" could either be the stone at the corner of a foundation from which the other sides are measured (the phrase is literally, "stone of the corner"), or it could be the keystone in the top of the wall.

Verse 44 is missing from some early manuscripts, perhaps being added from Luke 20:18. However, the evidence argues that it should be included here, having been left out inadvertently.

COMMENTS:

The second parable Jesus gives in response to the chief priests and scribes' challenge (21:23-27), relates to a master and his vineyard. It is easy to detect the references Jesus is making in this parable. God is the "master, the householder." The Jews, particularly the Jewish leaders, are the tenant farmers. The son in the parable is the Son of God, Jesus Himself. This householder prepared and planted a vineyard and prepared for it in every way possible, renting it out to farmers and then he went on a distant journey.

At harvest time, he sent servants to collect his harvest. The farmers, who had been entrusted with the stewardship of the vineyard, decided they wanted all the harvest. Subsequently, they beat some servants, killed some, and stoned others. Finally, the master sent his own son. Whether this would happen in reality is not the point of the parable; it is theoretically possible. The master believed the tenant farmers would respect his son.

However, the farmers reasoned that if they killed the son, the vineyard would be theirs in perpetuity. Yet the farmers, seeing the son was the heir of the vineyard decided to kill the son and the vineyard would be theirs. Therefore, they took the son and dragged him outside the vineyard and killed him.

As Jesus had done before (21:31), He asks the chief priests and scribes a question for them to answer: "What will he do to those farmers?" The naive men answered that their evil wickedness would have to be punished severely and the vineyard would be rented to someone else who would provide the fruit at the appropriate time.

In verses 42-44, Jesus gives the application to His parable asking the men if they had never read Psalm 118:22-23. The stone which the builders had rejected, for whatever reason, was used by the master as the head of the corner. The lord, himself, had performed this work and he found it marvelous. In verse 43, Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and the large-scale (though not *en masse*) rejection of the Jewish people. The "Kingdom of God" would be taken away from them (not just the chief priests and scribes but the nation of Israel as a whole) and given to another people, Gentiles, who would provide its fruit. In application of the parable to reality, Jesus was taken outside of the city and crucified. The Hebrew writer says that Jesus had to suffer outside of the camp of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:11-12). Further applying the "stone" passages, Jesus states that the "Stone" would be a stone of stumbling for the Jews and it would crush those who would not accept His teachings. It is clear that this parable anticipates the destruction of the temple as well as the city of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, for their sins which culminated in the crucifixion of the Son of God.

The priests and Pharisees (who are here mentioned for the first time since 19:3) knew this parable was directed at them and they despised Jesus all the more. They began searching for an opportunity to seize Him but could not do so publicly since they feared the people because, like John (21:26), the people held Jesus as a prophet. But, they will be provided their opportunity.

APPLICATION:

This specific parable is directly applicable to the religious leaders and the Jews of Jesus' day. Yet, the application is relevant in the sense that Christians are to continue producing fruit and providing a harvest for our Master; see Galatians 5:22-23; John 15.

Jesus has asked His question: "Have you never read...?" several times: 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31. This illustrates to us three points: 1) God's word was written; 2) God expects people to read His word; 3) God expects people to obey His word. We could add an implicit lesson too: God expects people to understand His word. All four of these points are either rejected by too many people in the modern world or twisted beyond recognition.

As we pointed out in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus is the stone on which the church of Christ (Christianity) is built: 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20. The "nation" which receives the kingdom now consists of both Jews and Gentiles: Rom. 10:19; 1 Peter 2:9.