

New Testament Assignment

Mark 12:1-12

Verses 1-12: The wicked vinedressers are a parable of Israel. Jesus taught this parable to confront the chief priests and elders and reveal their hypocritical character.

Mark 12:1 "And he began to speak unto them by parables. A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about , and digged the winevat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."

"Them": The chief priests, scribes and elders (11:27).

"Vineyard": A common sight in that region. The hillsides of Palestine were covered with grape vineyards, the backbone of the economy. Here it is a symbol for Israel (Psalm 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21). Jesus uses (Isa. 5:1-2), as the basis for this imagery (see note on Matt. 21:33).

"A hedge": Literally "a fence." It may have been a stone wall or a hedge of briars built for protection.

"Digged a place for": Located under the winepress. The grapes were squeezed in the press and the juice ran through a trough into this lower basin, where it could be collected into wineskins or jars.

"Tower": This structure had a 3-fold purpose:

- (1) it served as a lookout post;
- (2) it provided shelter for the workers; and
- (3) it was used for storage of seed and tools.

"Let it out to husbandmen": Jesus added to the picture from (Isaiah 5:1-2). The owner makes an agreement with men he believes are reliable caretakers, who are to pay a certain percentage of the proceeds to him as rent. The rest of the profit belonged to them for their work in cultivating the crop. The "vine-growers" represent the Jewish leaders.

"By parables" means "parabolically," denoting the manner in which Jesus spoke, for He uses only one parable. The vineyard stands for Israel, as the leaders recognize (verse 12).

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This parable about the vineyard is really the history of the Church. Jesus spoke this in front of the so-called religious people of the day. It is important for us to see ourselves in this, as well. These scribes, Pharisees, and priests, probably, would not even understand that He was telling them of their failures, because their hearts were hardened. They could not receive the truth.

The man who planted the garden was God. Just as God put Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden to dress and keep it, God entrusted this symbolic vineyard here, to the physical house of Israel. God Himself, protected them from their enemies. God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, left this group of Israel His law to go by.

He promised if they would keep His Commandments, He would bless them. God left it in the hands of His people and went to heaven (far country). These husbandmen were His people.

Verses 2-5: These “servants” would stand for the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist.

Mark 12:2 “And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard.”

“The season”: This usually occurred for the first time in the fifth year after the initial planting (Lev. 19:23-25).

“Servant”: All the servants or slaves in the parable, represent the Old Testament prophets.

God sent these prophets to warn His people of what would happen, if they did not keep His Commandments. The husbandmen were to produce fruit. Christians must produce other Christians. A person is judged by God by the fruit he produces.

Mark 12:3 “And they caught, and beat him, and sent away empty.”

The Jews would not accept these prophets, and they beat them and killed many of them. These prophets’ messages were rejected. The Jews did not grow in the Lord from these prophets at all.

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Mark 12:4 "And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded in the head, and sent away shamefully handled."

We know that was still continuous rejection of the judges and prophets that God sent to warn the Jews. With every blessing for obeying God's commands there was a curse, if they were not obeyed.

Mark 12:5 "And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some."

God's patience with His rebellious people was one of the great mysteries. God forgave them and started them out again, over and over; but they continued to go away from God instead of toward Him.

Verses 6-8: Jesus foresees the treatment He will receive. He will be cast out of the vineyard. Hebrews 13:12 speaks of Jesus suffering "without the gate."

Mark 12:6 "Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son."

"His well-beloved": The son represents Jesus Christ (see note on Matt. 21:37).

God's love was so great for a world caught up in sin that he sent His only begotten Son. He said to Himself, "They will not reject my Son". He had tried everything else He knew to do to save these ungrateful people. Now, He would send His Son.

This was the very God, God the Son, who took on the form of flesh and dwelt among us. Surely God's beloved chosen family would believe Him.

Mark 12:7 "But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours."

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“The inheritance shall be ours”: The vine-growers were greedy; because they wanted the entire harvest and the vineyard for themselves and would stop at nothing to achieve that end. They plotted to kill the owner’s son. Because Jesus had achieved such a following, the Jewish leaders believed the only way to maintain their position and power over the people was to kill Him (John 11:48).

Instead of those chosen of God accepting the Son of God and reverencing Him, they rejected Him and plotted to kill Him. There was overwhelming evidence who He was, but they did not accept it. The voice from heaven calling Jesus God’s Son should be enough.

The feeding of the 5000 should have told them who He was. The opening of blind eyes, the draught of fishes, any of these things should have told them who He was. There were thousands of miracles. Probably they knew who He was, and just did not want to turn over their power to Him.

Mark 12:8 “And they took him, and killed , and cast out of the vineyard.”

We see from this that God the Father had had enough at this point. He had done all He could to save His chosen people, but now they had killed His beloved Son. The fig tree had truly died. The Jews would be passed over now and the message would go to the Gentiles.

Mark 12:9 “What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.”

“Destroy the husbandmen”: The owner of the vineyard will execute the vine-growers, thus serving as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), and the nation of Israel. According to Matthew, this verdict was echoed by the chief priests, scribes and elders (see note on Matthew 21:41).

“Give the vineyard unto others”: This was fulfilled in the establishment of Christ’s church and its leaders, who were mostly Gentiles.

Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70 may well be a partial fulfillment of this statement.

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In Romans 11:25 we read, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

God had made a way for the Gentile believers to be saved. God took the vineyard from the Jew and turned it over to the Gentile believers who accepted His Son as Savior.

Verses 10-11: This messianic prophecy is a quotation of (Psalm 118:22-23), from the LXX. Jesus continued His teaching in the form of a parable, but here His kingdom is seen as a building instead of a vineyard. The point is that the rejected Son and the rejected stone represent Christ.

Mark 12:10 "And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:"

"The stone which the builders rejected": Builders typically rejected stones until they found one perfectly straight in lines that could serve as the cornerstone, which was critical to the symmetry and stability of the building.

In Jesus' metaphor, He Himself is the stone the builders (the Jewish religious leaders), rejected (crucified). But the resurrected Christ is the cornerstone (Acts 4:10-12; 1 Pet. 2:6-7; see note on Matt. 21:42; see Psalm 118:22-23).

The scribes, priests, and Pharisees had rejected Jesus, and God started a new Church with Jesus as the Cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:4, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious,"

This describes Jesus the choice Cornerstone on whom the church would be built upon.

1 Peter 2:5, tells about how we, Christians, fit into this building, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

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We, Christians, are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. We dwell in God, and He dwells in us.

Mark 12:11 "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

"Marvelous" is used in the sense of "remarkable" or "striking."

The building of this house with Jesus as the Cornerstone was God's work. The ways of God are really so wonderful they are beyond our understanding.

Mark 12:12 "And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way."

"Against them": The chief priests, scribes and elders were completely aware that Christ was condemning their actions, but it only aroused their hatred, not their repentance.

This is so strange that they were more afraid of the people than they were of God. They even realized this parable was about them, and they did not repent. They went away waiting until they had a better chance to move against Him.

Verses 13-17: The second of a series of questions that the Jewish religious leaders hoped would trap Jesus into declaring Himself an insurrectionist (11:28). This one concerns the controversial issue of paying taxes to Rome.

Mark 12:13 "And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in words."

"Pharisees ... Herodians": Matthew indicates that disciples of the Pharisees accompanied the Herodians. The Pharisees may have hoped that Jesus would not recognize them and be caught off-guard by their seemingly sincere question. The Herodians were a political party of Jews who backed Herod Antipas, who in turn was only a puppet of Rome (see note on Matt. 22:16).

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Herodians were Jews who were loyal to Herod. We see here, that they were plotting together to see if they could trap Jesus. Jesus was too smart for them, and the tables had been turned on them every time they tried to trap Jesus by asking questions that were unanswerable.

Jesus always replied with questions they couldn't answer themselves. These Herodians loved causing others to pay Caesar taxes.

Mark 12:14 "And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"

"Carest for no man" This speaks of impartiality or showing no favoritism. While this was flattery on the part of the Pharisees and Herodians, it was nonetheless true that Jesus would not be swayed by a person's power, prestige, or position.

"Tribute to Caesar": The Greek word for "poll tax" was borrowed from the Latin word that gives us the English "census". The Romans counted all the citizens and made each one pay an annual poll tax of one denarius (see note on Matt. 22:17).

First of all, their calling Jesus Master was a lie, because they did not consider Jesus as their master at all. They were trying to defame Jesus, not to build Him up. They were trying to trap Jesus. If Jesus said to pay Caesar, the Jews would be offended; and if He said not to pay, then Caesar and these Herodians would be mad.

These Herodians and the Pharisees were on opposite sides, but they had joined together to do Jesus in. They were saying that Jesus was the truth. If they really believed that, they would not be trying to trap Him. If they didn't believe it, they were lying. Jesus had taught us to not be a respecter of persons.

Mark 12:15 "Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see."

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“Hypocrisy”: The Pharisees and Herodians, using feigned interest in His teaching, attempted to hide their true intention to trap Jesus. But He perceived their true motives (John 2:25).

“Why tempt ye me?” Jesus’ response exposed the true motive of the Pharisees and Herodians and revealed their hypocrisy.

“Penny”: (“denarius”). This small silver coin, minted by the Roman emperor, was the equivalent of a day’s wage for a common laborer or soldier (see note on Matt. 22:19).

Jesus had them completely figured out. He knew they were hypocrites, saying one thing and meaning something entirely different. He knew that all of this was a plot to get Him in trouble. His request for a penny was so that He could trap them.

Mark 12:16 “And they brought. And he saith unto them, Whose this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar’s.”

“Image”: On one side of the denarius was likely the image of the current emperor, Tiberius, though at that time it could have also been Augustus, since both coins were in circulation. Tiberius is most likely because the response was “Caesar’s,” indicating the current ruler rather than the past one.

“Superscription”: If the coin was minted by Tiberius, it would have read, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, the son of the Divine Augustus” on one side and “Chief Priest” on the other (see note on Matt. 22:19).

Many people believe that this says to pay taxes, but it really doesn’t. What He really showed them was a penny. The penny had Caesar’s picture on it, so give him his penny.

Mark 12:17 “And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marveled at him.”

“Render to Caesar”: The Greek word for “render” means, “to pay or give back,” which implies a debt. All who lived within the realm of Caesar were obligated to return to him the tax that was owed him. It was not

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optional. Thus, Jesus declared that all citizens are under divine obligation to pay taxes to whatever government is over them (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; see note on Matt. 22:21).

“They marveled”, perhaps at the ease with which He escaped their trap. The Christian citizen has obligations to government, but there are limits. Allegiance to God is primary. One ought to do both without neglecting either, where possible. Other related passages are (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Jesus didn’t answer this at all. His answer marveled them, because He didn’t answer them. We know that everything belongs to God. There was a question of what belonged to Caesar.

Mark Chapter 12 Questions

1. In verse 1, Jesus began to speak to them by _____.
2. Who was the man who planted the vineyard symbolic of?
3. Who was the vineyard symbolic of?
4. What did he “built a hedge about it” mean?
5. This parable about the vineyard was what?
6. Who were the husbandmen?
7. This servant that God sent was symbolic of whom?
8. When God sent people to help His chosen people, what did they do to them?
9. Who was the last one God sent to them?
10. What did they do to Him?

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