



The Vineyard Parables of Yeshua

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Terms

- **Tanakh (תנ"ך)**
 - An acronym for the “Old Testament”
 - *Torah* (“Instruction”), Genesis – Deuteronomy
 - *Neviim* (“Prophets”), historical books and prophets
 - *Ketuvim* (“Writings”), remainder
- **Besech (בש"ס) (“beh-sekh”)** (a term I coined)
 - An acronym for the “New Testament”
 - *Besorah* (“Good News”), Gospels – Acts
 - *Sepherim* (“Letters”), Romans – Judah
 - *Chazoth* (“Visions”), Revelation
- **My Rationale for Besech**
 - *B'rit Hadashah* is the New Covenant with Israel & Judah, not a canon of Scripture.
 - No one refers to the Tanakh as the *B'rit Yashan*.



Sources of Study

- **Jewish Translations of the Tanakh**
 - Septuagint (LXX), Greek
 - Syriac, Aramaic (by Messianic Jews)
 - Targums, Aramaic
- **Modern Messianic Jewish English Versions**
 - *Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)*, David Stern
 - *Hebrew Names Version (HNV)*, Michael Johnson
 - *Messianic Writings (MW)*, Daniel Gruber
 - *Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB)*, Phillip Goble
 - *Tree of Life: New Covenant (TLV)*, Messianic Jewish Family Bible Project
- **Messianic Commentaries Consulted**
 - Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*
 - Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua King Messiah*
 - David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*
 - Brad Young, *Jesus: The Jewish Theologian • The Parables*



Parable

- **Term**
 - Grk. *parabolê*, from Heb. *mashal*, verb = “to be like” (Job 30:19; Ps 28:1).
 - Incorporates a comparison; may be a proverb, a figure, a riddle, or a story.
 - Parables were common tools for teaching truth.
- **Usage**
 - Primary teaching method of Yeshua (Mark 4:34).
 - 55 parables in the Besorah; 25 story parables.
- **Message**
 - The parable has a central message or point.
 - Yeshua’s parables teach about the Kingdom, God and the Messiah.
 - Parables imply a background of opposition.



Yeshua's Parables With Vineyards

- List

- The Fig Tree in the Vineyard
Luke 13:6-9
- Workers in the Vineyard,
Matt 20:1-16
- The Two Sons and the
Vineyard, Matt 21:28-32
- The Wicked Vinedressers,
Matt 21:33-41



- Foundational Elements

- The vineyard symbolizes Israel: Isa 5:1-5; Jer 12:10
- The vineyard is not criticized in these parables.
- The owner is *Adonai-Tzva'ot*, Isa 5:7; 27:2.
- The vineyard ≠ "the vine," Hos 10:1; John 15:1



Overview of the Vineyard Parables

- Agricultural Setting

- Grape vineyard: wine was the ultimate production, an important commodity in Israelite culture:
 - Personal use (Gen 14:18; 27:28; Deut 14:26; Ps 104:15)
 - Religious use (Ex 29:40; Num 15:5; 18:12; Lev 23:13; *Pes.* 10:1).

- Stories feature conflicted parties

- Fig tree vs. the owner
- Father vs. his sons
- Workers vs. the owner
- Vinedressers vs. the owner

- Outcome

- Obedience and reward of some
- Judgment on others



Fig Tree in the Vineyard



Luke 13:6-9



Parable Narrative – Luke 13:6

- **Story Overview**
 - Audience: Public, adversaries present
 - Location: Galil (Galilee)
 - Characters: Owner and vinedresser (verse 7)
 - Story note: fig tree planted in the vineyard.
 - Yeshua offers no interpretation of the parable.
- **Agriculture**
 - It was not unusual in ancient times to grow fig trees in vineyards.
 - Fig trees absorbed large amounts of nutrients from the soil, depriving the surrounding plants of nutrition and water.



Parable Narrative – Luke 13:7

- **Owner's complaint**
 - The owner looked for fruit on the tree for three years, but found none.
- **Considerations**
 - There were usually two crops of figs per year.
 - The Torah restricted eating fruit from trees for the first three years.
 - In the 4th year the fruit was given to the Lord and in the fifth year the fruit could be eaten, Lev 19:23-25
 - This is at least the 4th year; no wonder the owner was disappointed.
 - A barren fig tree had a three-fold disadvantage
 - It yielded no fruit.
 - It took up valuable space that a fruit-bearer might use.
 - It needlessly deteriorated the land and the vineyard.



Parable Narrative – Luke 13:8

- **Owner's solution**
 - "Uproot the tree and destroy it."
 - Fruit-bearing trees were not to be destroyed (Deut 20:19; Baba Kama 91b; 92a)
- **Vinedresser's Plan – owner's part**
 - "Leave it alone."
 - The vinedresser intercedes and begs a year of grace, a 5th year.
- **Vinedresser's Plan – his part**
 - The vine-dresser promises to care for the tree.
 - He will dig around the tree. (Exposes falsehood)
 - He will add fertilizer to make up for the nutrients the fig tree has depleted. (Proclaims truth)
 - The plan conforms to contemporary Jewish farming practice (Mishnah Shebiith 2:2).



Parable Narrative – Luke 13:9

- **Vinedresser's Plan (cont.)**
 - The vinedresser is will eventually remove the tree if no fruit appears after his efforts to save it.
 - Note: the mention of “next year” in CJB and other versions is incorrect. The Greek text is lit. “in the future” (found in the OJB), so the time is really indefinite. The HNV, MW and TLV omit the time reference completely.
- **Considerations**
 - The vinedresser considers the interests of the owner.
 - The owner wants fruit; so does the vinedresser.
 - The agreement of the owner to the plan is implied.



Symbolism of the Fig Tree

- **The Fruitful Fig Tree**
 - Tanakh: godliness (Mic 7:1-2)
 - Besekh: Kingdom of God (Luke 21:29-31)
- **Barren Fig Tree: Israel or Jewish people**
 - Christian scholarship generally
 - Stern & Kasdan adopt this interpretation (??)
 - This view supports Replacement Theology.
- **Barren Fig Tree: Leaders or Rulers**
 - Rulers condemned in Mic 7:3; (cf. Judg 9:10; Hos 9:10)
 - Edersheim: “civil and the ecclesiastical polity of Israel;” i.e., the rulers.
 - Consider Yeshua's cursing the fig tree (Matt 21:18-21). Did he curse Israel?
 - Who immediately challenged Yeshua? (Matt 21:23)



Point of the Parable

- There is a higher standard for those who lead than those who follow.
 - Heb 13:17; Jacob 3:1
- Grace is available for a limited time, and then a time of judgment is coming
 - Luke 13:24-35; 19:42-44; 21:20-24.
- Only repentance will bring deliverance
 - Luke 13:5.



The Workers in the Vineyard



Matthew 20:1-16



Parable Narrative

- **Story Overview**

- Audience: Yeshua's *talmidim* (Matt 19:27-30)
- Location: Judea
- Characters: vineyard owner and laborers
- Story note: the owner does the hiring
- The parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven, 20:1.
- Yeshua offers a powerful application of the parable.

- **Act I (Matt 20:1-7)**

- The owner hired laborers shortly after sunrise
- Owner hired more laborers at the 3rd hour (9 am)
 - The owner promised to do what was "just," 20:4
- Owner hired more laborers at the 6th hour (noon)
- Owner hired more laborers at the 11th hour (5 pm)
- All workers agreed to work for a denarius per day
 - A denarius was a subsistence wage.



Parable Narrative

- **Act II (Matt 20:8-10)**

- Foreman called the workers to receive their wages.
- All the workers were paid their denarius.

- **Act III (Matt 20:11-16)**

- Those hired first grumbled because they thought they should be paid more than those hired last.
- The owner justified his actions with two reasons:
 - Contract law: each worker was paid per the wage agreement, verse 13 (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:15)
 - Property Law: the owner has the right to do as he wishes with his property, verse 15. (Ex 20:15; 22:1-15)





Parable Analysis

- **Analysis of the Complaint (20:11-15)**
 - The first group wanted equal pay for equal work.
 - Fairness is usually defined as “equality.”
 - Fairness really means getting “what I want.”
 - They were not concerned about the rights of the owner or the needs of other workers.
 - The Owner said their eye was “evil” (envious, greedy and stingy), Matt 20:15; cf. Luke 16:14
 - The parable was likely a reminder to Shimón Kêfa Baryona of the teaching in 19:27-30.
- **Analysis of the Owner’s Actions**
 - The owner followed Torah standards (Matt 20:4).
 - The owner exhibited no favoritism.
 - The owner demonstrated concern for needs.
 - The owner kept his word.



Point of the Parable

- **Yeshua’s Application**
 - The “first will be last and the last first,” 20:16, a reversal of fortunes in the age to come.
 - “The first” is an idiom for rulers & societal leaders.
- **Context**
 - See Matthew 19:30: same statement.
 - Saying occurs after Yeshua tells his apostles, “you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” 19:28
 - What does this imply about the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel?
 - The names of the twelve apostles are also on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:14).



The Two Sons and the Vineyard



Matthew 21:28-32



Parable Narrative

- **Story Overview**
 - Audience: Chief Kohanim and Zakenim, Matt 21:23
 - Given at: Temple in Jerusalem
 - Characters: vineyard owner and his two sons
 - Story note: character reversal by the sons
 - Yeshua offers a strong application of the parable.
- **Act I (Matt 21:28)**
 - A landowner had two sons.
 - The owner asked each son to work in his vineyard.
- **Act II (Matt 21:29-30)**
 - The first son refused to work, but afterwards repented (*t'shuvah*) and worked in the vineyard.
 - The second son agreed to work, but then changed his mind and did not work in the vineyard.



Point of the Parable

- **Yeshua's application, Part 1 (Matt 21:31)**
 - The first son is like tax collectors and harlots who believed in and followed Yeshua.
 - The second son is like the hypocritical rulers who refused to believe in Yeshua.
 - Thus, tax collectors and harlots will enter the kingdom before the rulers.
- **Yeshua's application, Part 2 (Matt 21:32)**
 - Yochanan the Immerser came with a message of righteousness.
 - The rulers refused to heed the message.
 - Tax collectors and harlots believed the message.
 - The rulers did not repent after witnessing the results of Yochanan's preaching, thereby incurring the wrath of Heaven.



The Wicked Vinedressers



Matthew 21:33-41

Parallel: Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18



Parable Narrative

• Setting

- Audience: Chief Kohanim and Zakenim, Matt 21:23
- Given at: Temple in Jerusalem
- Characters: Owner, vinedressers, owner's servants and owner's son
- Story note: details on vineyard development & management.
- Yeshua offers an interpretative application of the parable.



• Act I (Matt 21:33-34)

- Vineyard planted
- Winepress built
- Watchtower erected
- Land rented to vinedressers
- Owner leaves on a journey



Parable Narrative

• Act II (Matt 21:34-39)

- Vineyard produces a harvest.
- Servants sent to collect owner's share.
- Servants assaulted and/or killed.
- Owner sends his "beloved son." (Mark 12:6)
- Vinedressers plot to take possession of the land.
- Vinedressers kill the beloved son.



• Act III (Matt 21:40-45)

- Owner purposes to destroy the murderers.
- The rejected son likened to a rejected stone.
- The rejected stone becomes a cornerstone.
- The vineyard is given to other vinedressers.
- The rejected stone crushes his enemies.



Point of the Parable – Matt 21:40-45

- “What will the Owner do when he comes?”
 - To “come” is an idiom for bringing judgment.
 - Unnamed persons answer the question.
- Anticipated Actions of the Owner
 - The owner will “destroy those evil men,” 21:41, 44
 - The owner will delegate vinedressing to others
 - Verse 41 has “vinedressers”
 - Verse 43 has “nation” or “people” (Grk. *ethnos*)
- *Ethnos* (Gentiles?)
 - Any group held together by customs
 - Sometimes a derogatory term for common people
 - Used for *goy/goyim* in LXX, but often includes Israel
 - Used for Jews 14 times in the Besekh
 - Use of *ethnos* does not mean rejection of Israel.
 - *Ethnos* is a contrast to the wicked vinedressers.



Meaning of Figurative Language

- Fruit
 - Justice & righteousness, Isa 5:7
- Wicked Vinedressers
 - Rulers: so Kasdan, Stern & Young (Matt 21:45; Mark 12:16; cf. Isa 3:14; Jer 12:10)
- Beloved son (spoken only 3 times in the Besorah)
 - Yeshua (Matt 3:17; 17:5).
- Stone
 - King David is the stone and the builders are Samuel & Jesse (Targum, Ps 118:22-23).
 - Yeshua is the son of David; the builders = Sanhedrin
- Chief (Heb. *rosh*) Cornerstone (Heb. *pinnah*)
 - Cornerstone: tribal head (Judg 20:2; 1 Sam 14:38)
 - Chief: Yeshua is the head over all kings



Meaning of Figurative Language

- **Other vinedressers/*ethnos***
 - Christianity, the “New Israel” (fallacy, Rom 11:1-2)
 - Church Fathers; Replacement theology
 - Modern Christian commentators
 - **Apostles and their Appointees (Stern)**
 - Judges over the twelve tribes, Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Eph 4:11ff
 - **Messianic Jews (Kasdan)**
 - Apostolic era: “tens of thousands,” Acts 21:20
 - Modern Messianic Jewish movement within Israel
 - **Kingdom of God**
 - Citizens in the Commonwealth of Israel, Eph 2:11-13
 - Grafted-in to the Olive Tree, Rom 11:17-18
 - Faithful disciples (Jew and Gentile) who give the Owner his fruits in their seasons, Matt 21:41



Final Point on Yeshua’s Adversaries

- **Their identity**
 - Sadducean priesthood, controlled by the Romans
 - Barren fig tree: no spiritual fruit
 - Unfaithful son: morally & ethically bankrupt
 - Greedy son: corrupt Temple business
 - Wicked vinedresser: violence against prophets
- **Their reaction**
 - They personalized the parables, Matt 21:44.
 - They tried to arrest Yeshua that hour, Luke 20:19.
- **Their judgment (as prophesied)**
 - Uprooted from the land (as the barren fig tree)
 - Authority removed by the Romans in A.D. 70
 - Sadducees ceased to exist.



The Parables as a Mirror

- **Who am I?**
 - Fruitful fig tree or barren fig tree?
 - Faithful son or unfaithful son?
 - Generous worker or greedy worker?
 - Godly vinedresser or wicked vinedresser?
- **What do I owe God?**
 - Righteousness
 - Faithfulness
 - Stewardship
 - Godliness

