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PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

– MAY 24. – *Luke 20:9-19.* –

Parallel accounts – Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12.

Golden Text – "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." – Luke 20:17.

THIS parable formed a part of our Lord's discourse on the last day of his public ministry. He had been teaching daily in the Temple, and the people, much impressed by his mighty works and his wonderful words, "were very attentive to hear him." (Luke 19:47,48.) But the more his fame spread abroad and the people were influenced by his teaching, the more the envy and opposition of the scribes and Pharisees increased and intensified into a settled murderous hatred, which plotted and schemed to accomplish his death. It was in this spirit and intent that the chief priests and scribes and elders of Israel came upon him with what they esteemed puzzling questions, seeking to entrap him in his words and thereby to gain some pretext for his arrest.

The shrewdness with which our Lord met their attacks commands the admiration of all. He was more than a match for all the gainsayers, putting them to silence and to shame. Then he spoke this parable, which they perceived to be against them, and which the more angered them, so that they would have laid hands on him then had they not feared the people. – Verse 19.

In the parable, the owner of the vineyard represented God, and the "vineyard" represented the Jewish nation as described under the same figure in Isaiah 5:1-7. – "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." God had done much for his vineyard in the way of planting and care and cultivation; and in view of this he inquires (Isa. 5:4), "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" But nevertheless it

repaid him wild grapes instead of good grapes, – "and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry, etc." And the "husbandmen" to whom the vineyard was let were the divinely constituted religious leaders of the nation. These husbandmen had this stewardship from the time of the exodus down to the time of the coming of Messiah, a period of nearly nineteen centuries.

At various seasons during the age God specially looked for fruits of righteousness, sending to them his faithful prophets, who were lightly esteemed and illy treated – especially by the husbandmen. – Matt. 23:31,32.

Last of all, in the harvest or end of the age, God sent unto them his Son, saying, "It may be they will reverence my Son." But no, in their selfish ambition to retain their stewardship, they said among themselves, "This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." "So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him." The application of the parable was too manifest to be misunderstood. The guilty consciences needed no further accusation. The self-righteous hypocrites perceived that the [R1982 : page 116] great Teacher had read their hearts and was aware of their dark designs.

In the further progress of the parable was the prophecy of his own final triumph, even though they should kill him; for he was the stone of which the Psalmist prophesied, saying, "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner" (Psa. 118:22), the building of God being referred to as a pyramid, of which the topstone is the chief corner stone. (See also Zech. 4:7.) This stone might indeed be rejected by them then, but that would not hinder its exaltation in God's due time as the chief stone in the glorious spiritual temple of God.

In stumbling over Christ at his first advent, the Jewish nation was indeed broken to pieces; and ever since they have been a nation scattered and peeled (Isa. 18:2), all the world being witness to the fact. The world is also witness to the fact that those wicked husbandmen

who crucified the Lord were destroyed as such. They lost their prestige and power and honor and office (and many of them doubtless perished literally in the destruction of Jerusalem), and were superseded by the more worthy apostles and teachers of the gospel of Christ.

Such was the testimony of Christ against fleshly Israel [R1983 : page 116] as a people, and against their religious leaders and teachers; and as we read the prophecy and mark how true to the letter has been the fulfilment, we should not fail to mark also another prophecy, pointing to a double fulfilment, – first, upon fleshly Israel, and, secondly, upon nominal spiritual Israel, or the nominal Christian Church. It reads, – "And he shall be for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to *both* the houses of Israel." (Isa. 8:14.) In this as in other things the two houses of Israel, the fleshly of the Jewish age, and the spiritual of the Gospel age, stand related to each other as type and antitype; and the likeness is striking. The attitude of the public teachers of to-day, like those of the Jewish age, is against the Lord and the truth now due in these days of his presence. They are closing their eyes to the light that is now shining, and, as a result, both they and all who follow their leading are stumbling into the ditch of infidelity; and soon they will all be overwhelmed in the great tribulation of which the Lord and the prophet forewarn us. – Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 18:4.

The result of the stumbling of the nominal gospel Church over this stone will be the same as in the case of the Jewish Church: they will be broken; the whole institution will be disintegrated, and only the faithful remnant of this age (as of that) will be gathered into the Kingdom of God – a "little flock" to whom "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom."

But when this corner stone crowns the finished temple of God, the Church glorified, when the Kingdom is established in glory and power, upon whomsoever this stone falls it will grind him to powder; it will utterly destroy him. "Every soul that will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." – Acts 3:23.

With the example of the stumbling of fleshly Israel in view, how careful should every Christian be to see to it that he is not among those of this age who form the antitype – either of the blind leaders or of the blind multitudes who follow their leading into the yawning ditch which shall surely engulf all of the unfaithful.
