



# Jesus Confronts the Pharisees

*Matthew 21:33–46*



## LESSON GOAL

Students will believe and repent when they see the danger of rejecting Christ.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- The Jewish leaders rejected Christ.
- The parable of the landowner revealed the religious leaders' sin.
- People who reject Jesus will be punished.

## KEY VERSE

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”

—*Matthew 21:43*

## APPLICATION

- Submit to Jesus Christ as Lord.
- Demonstrate your salvation by bearing fruit.
- Warn others of coming judgment.

## NEXT WEEK

Jesus Teaches the Parable of the Talents

*Matthew 25:14–30*

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4



## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children.” —Deuteronomy 11:18–19*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

Although the Pharisees, chief priests, and scribes had already determined to seize Jesus when he came to Jerusalem for the Passover, His presence in the city infuriated them. Jesus spent the week cleansing the temple (Matt. 21:12–13), healing the blind and lame (21:14), and teaching the people (Mark 11:18). Everything He said and did displayed His authority as the Son of David. When even the children recognized Jesus’ greatness and sang to Him, the chief priests and scribes were indignant and questioned whether Jesus thought He was worthy of such praise (Matt. 21:15–16). They tried to trap Jesus by asking Him where His authority came from (Matt. 21:23–27). When the scribes and chief priests saw how the people attentively listened to Jesus’ authoritative teaching, their hearts were inflamed by jealousy and insecurity and they planned how they could kill the Messiah (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47–48).

Even though Jesus knew that God had predestined His death (Acts 4:27–28), Jesus still warned the leaders of the judgment they would face for rejecting Him. In order to confront the duplicity of the religious leaders, Jesus first told the parable of the two sons. The leaders were like the son who had promised obedience but did not obey (Matt. 21:28–29). While the leaders thought of themselves as much holier than the tax collectors and sinners, the tax collectors and sinners were the ones who humbled themselves and obeyed (21:30). Jesus continued to rebuke and warn the leaders with the parable of the landowner. In the parable of the landowner, Jesus exposed the leaders’ habit of rejecting God’s servants. The leaders loved their own authority so much that they were determined to destroy God’s Son. Because of their rejection of God’s king, the leaders were on the verge of being destroyed themselves.

#### Jesus Confronts the Rejection of God’s Son with a Parable (Matt. 21:33–41)

Like all his parables, Jesus’ parable of the landowner unfolds quickly. A landowner built a vineyard on his land, complete with a hedge to keep out the animals, a winepress to collect the grapes’ juice, and a tower to watch for enemies (21:33). The vineyard was leased to vinedressers while the landowner was away on a journey (21:33). When the time came to collect the vineyard’s fruit, the landowner sent servants to collect the fruit (21:34). Suddenly, the parable became violent as the tenants beat, killed, and stoned two groups of the landowner’s servants (21:35–36). When the land owner at last sent his son, the tenants seized the opportunity to kill the landowner’s heir (21:37–39). Jesus ended the parable by asking what the owner would do to the vinedressers (21:40–41). The chief priests and scribes quickly responded that the vinedresser would destroy the wicked tenants and lease the land to others who would give the required fruit (21:41).

When Jesus finished the parable, the indignant response of the chief priests and Pharisees indicates that they had not yet understood the point of Jesus' parable. The vineyard was a common picture of Israel in the Old Testament (Isa. 5:1–7). Although God had nurtured Israel and planted His vineyard in the Promised Land, Israel's leaders did not lead the nation in obedience. The prophets whom God sent to Israel were beaten (Jer. 20:1–2; 1 Kings 22:24), stoned (2 Chron. 24:21–22; Matt. 23:37), and killed (1 Kings 18:4, 13; Jer. 26:20–23). Because of His mercy, God continued to send the prophets to call the people to repentance and ultimately sent His Son. When the chief priests and Pharisees recognized that God's own Son had come, they planned His murder so they could escape His authority and seize His inheritance. In a desperate attempt to remain free from God's reign, the chief priests and Pharisees would seize Jesus and kill Him outside the city just as the parable had illustrated.

After Jesus asked what the landowner would do to the tenants, the chief priests and Pharisees finished the parable for Him. They recognized that the tenants were "wicked men" who deserved to be destroyed. They also understood that the landowner would give his vineyard to tenants who would faithfully give the required fruit. But they apparently didn't understand that they were indicting themselves. The chief priests, Pharisees and scribes were the wicked men who would be destroyed for how they had murdered God's Son. Just a few verses later, Jesus revealed how God was going to judge Israel by taking away from Israel the blessing of bearing fruit of obedience and giving it to the church.

#### **Jesus Confronts the Rejection of God's Son with a Prophecy (Matt. 21:42–44)**

Jesus followed the leaders' answer with two prophecies that revealed to the chief priests and Pharisees the meaning of the parable. The first prophecy was quoted from Psalm 118:22–23. Jesus' phrase "Have you never read..." reveals that the leaders should have understood from Scripture that their rejection of Jesus and their plans to kill Him would not be the end of the Messiah. The quotation from Psalm 118 pictures builders picking over stones to use for construction. The stone which they considered unworthy to be used ultimately became the chief cornerstone, the most important stone in the building. (The cornerstone was most likely the foundation stone where two walls met. This important stone would determine how the rest of the building was constructed.) In Acts 4:11, Peter revealed that the stone rejected by the rulers and elders was Jesus Christ. Although they rejected Jesus, Jesus was raised from the dead and became the cornerstone in God's new temple, the church (1 Pet. 2:4–7). Since "this was the Lord's doing," only God can be praised for His plan for saving man and exalting Christ.

While the first prophecy came from Scripture, the second prophecy came from Jesus Himself. Israel was going to be judged for her rejection of the Messiah. Because they refused to be God's holy people and bear the fruit of repentance, God was going to give the kingdom of God to the church, His "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). Although Israel will repent in the future, the church has become the new nation bearing the fruits of the kingdom of God (Matt. 21:43). Jesus not only judged the nations but also individuals. He said, "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind to powder" (21:44). Christ is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pet. 2:8). Whether one is opposed to Christ and falls upon Him or apathetic toward Christ and is crushed by Him, the end is the same for those who reject Christ's demand of obedience. Those who do not bear the fruit of repentance will be destroyed.

## The Pharisees Continue their Rejection of God's Son (Matt. 21:45–46)

After Jesus supplemented the parable of the landowner with prophecies of His exaltation and the leaders' judgment, the chief priests and Pharisees "perceived that He was speaking of them" (Matt. 21:45). They were the tenants of God's vineyard who had hated God's prophets and now were about to kill His Son. But even after hearing how Christ would be exalted and themselves crushed, the chief priests and Pharisees still refused to beg Jesus to have mercy upon them. Instead, their hearts became more hardened and they would have seized Him right there (21:46). Only fear—not fear of God but fear of how the multitudes would react—restrained their hands from violence.

### Conclusion

Jesus' parable and prophecies revealed the terrible judgment which will be received by those who reject Him. Whether the lost sinner is opposed to Christ or apathetic toward Him, both responses are worthy of destruction. The lost person must fear the stone hovering overhead which will "grind him to powder" if he will not repent. In view of the coming judgment of those who reject Christ, the church, to whom has been given the kingdom of God, must be zealous to bear fruit worthy of Christ's blood.

## POINT TO THE TRUTH

*"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth."  
—Psalm 78:1*

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



### Review Questions

Where were Jesus and His disciples traveling to?  
*They were heading to Jerusalem.*

Where does Jesus send His disciples and what does He ask them to do?  
*Jesus sends them into the town and asks them to bring the donkey colt back to Him.*

How does Jesus enter into Jerusalem?  
*The disciples put their clothing on the colt and Jesus rode it into Jerusalem.*

What did the crowds say when they saw Jesus entering the city?  
*They said, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (21:9).*

What did the people do as Jesus came down the street?  
*The people in Jerusalem laid their coats and palm branches on the road before Jesus.*



## Difficult Concepts

**Cornerstone:** The cornerstone is the most important stone in the building. Although scholars debate if it is at the bottom of the structure or the top, the cornerstone holds together the whole building. Any number of sample walls could be built with blocks to demonstrate that one of the blocks is the most important. If you take out that one block, the whole structure falls.

**The stone which the builders rejected:** The Jews did not think Jesus was good enough to be their Messiah. They are pictured as builders who reject a stone that was not good enough to build with. Even though they rejected and killed the Messiah, He was exalted at His resurrection and will be exalted throughout eternity. Imagine the builders surprise when the stone they tossed aside became the cornerstone.



## Warning—Danger

Bring a number of warning signs to show the children e.g. beware of the dog, yield signs; beware of falling rocks; danger electric shock; beware wet floors; keep out; etc. Spend some time discussing the purpose of warning signs and the consequence of disregarding them. In today's lesson we are going to learn about the most serious warning sign of all. What do they think will happen if we disobey this warning sign? We will find out in today's lesson.



## What Seems Worst May Be Best

Bring a number of different containers to class, each with a treat in it. Have some containers which look like they contain something very special and others which appear undesirable e.g. a box of cereal, a box of soap, etc. Place one of the best treats inside one of the plain containers. Select a few children to come and choose a treat for themselves and then reveal that the best treat was actually inside the worst looking container. The people in Jesus' day were just like us, they rejected the best blessing that God had for them simply because the container did not look very fancy. Does anybody know what that blessing was? Listen and we'll find out in today's lesson.



## The Prophets of God

In the parable of the landowner, the servants who are killed represent the prophets God sent to Israel. Prepare the children to hear the lesson by reminding them of the prophets God sent to Israel. Use previous lessons and pictures to review the ministry of Moses and Elijah. Review how Moses and Elijah called the people of Israel to obedience and repentance but how the people of Israel typically rejected God's prophets. Have a brief pre-lesson of what the prophet required from Israel and how Israel responded to their message. End your presentation with John the Baptist, the prophet the students will most likely recall.



## The Stone the Builders Rejected

Help the children understand the picture of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone. Using blocks or small boxes, help the children build a tall structure. Count out enough blocks so that there are as many blocks as there are children, with one block left over. Tell the children that each child can only pick out one block before the building begins. After the children finish picking their blocks, point to the one rejected block and write "Cornerstone" on the side. Begin building with that block. Have the children bring their blocks to you one by one and build around the cornerstone block. Demonstrate how if you take out the cornerstone the whole structure falls. Finish by reading Matthew 21:42 and tell the



children that in today's lesson they are going to learn what this verse teaches about who Jesus is.

### Shake the Pyramid

This game will illustrate the importance of a cornerstone within a structure. For this game you will only need a stack of Styrofoam cups. Set up the Styrofoam cups by stacking them into a shape of a pyramid on top of a table. Instruct one student at a time to try to pull one of the corner cups out from the structure without knocking over the pyramid. After great difficulty and after many times of restacking the cups, it should be apparent to the students the game is impossible. This would be a great opportunity to talk about the importance of a cornerstone within a building. All the walls lean upon or rest against a cornerstone. If this cornerstone is removed, the building collapses (much like the pyramid in today's game). In today's lesson, Jesus is spoken of as being the chief cornerstone of the entire church. His life, death, and resurrection is what the entire church is built on. If it is removed, or rejected, the church cannot exist or stand.

## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done." —Psalm 78:4*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

Jesus had come back to the city of Jerusalem to teach tell the Jews to repent of their sins. He knew that this message would make the chief priests and Pharisees angry, and indeed it did. They were very jealous of the attention He received from the crowds. They realized that people were rejecting them to follow Christ. Because of their jealousy they planned a way to kill Him.

Jesus knew that He would eventually be killed but before that time He needed to confront the religious leaders' sin of pretending to be good but while actually their hearts were wicked. He told them a story called a parable to reveal their sin. This parable was about a landowner and his vineyard.

There was a man who owned a large piece of land. On this land, he built a vineyard. A vineyard is a place to grow grapes that they turned into juice and wine. The vineyard had a hedge all around it to keep out animals that would hurt the grapes, a winepress which was used to make the grape juice and a tower for guards to watch out for enemies. The landowner had to go on a long trip to someplace far away, so he hired other people to grow the grapes while he was gone. When it came time to harvest the grapes and make the juice and wine, which they would sell for money, the landowner sent his servants back to the vineyard to collect the fruit from the men he had hired to work the land. But when the servants got there they were badly mistreated. The men beat one, stoned another, and killed the third. He sent more servants, but the men did the same thing to them.

Finally, the landowner sent his son. He thought that the men would not dare hurt his son because they would respect him. But the men saw the landowner's son, and decided to kill him too and take his money.

When Jesus finished the parable, he asked the chief priests and Pharisees what they thought the landowner would do to the men when he returned to the vineyard. They said, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in the seasons" (21:41). Jesus taught this parable to show the Pharisees their true heart and what they were doing. What the Pharisees did not understand was that they were very much like the men in the parable who rented the vineyard. God was like the landowner, the prophets were like the servants that the men killed, and Jesus was like the son who was killed. The men who rented the vineyard had killed the landowner's son which is just what the Pharisees were planning to do to Jesus.

Jesus asked them if they had ever read a verse from the book of Psalms which says, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (21:42). They knew then that Jesus was saying that He is the cornerstone of the nation of Israel. A cornerstone is the most important stone in a building, and the Pharisees were rejecting Him. Jesus then explained that since they rejected Him, that the kingdom of God would be taken away from the Jews and given to others who accept him. This is just like what happened to the men in the parable. They rejected the landowner's son, so the landowner would destroy them, and give the land to people who would do what was right.

The Pharisees now understood exactly what Jesus meant, and it made them so angry that they wanted to kill him right then. The only thing that stopped them was the large crowd that was following Jesus. They were afraid that if they hurt Jesus, the crowd would hurt them, so they let Jesus go for the time.

The parable tells of the terrible judgment that will come to anyone who rejects Christ. This should cause those who have accepted Christ to work even harder to do what is right for Him, that they might be worthy of Him.



## Lesson Questions

What did Jesus teach about in today's lesson?

*Jesus taught about the parable of the landowner.*

Who watched the vineyard for the landowner while he was gone?

*The landowner rented out the vineyard to men called vinedressers while he was away.*

What happened when the landowner returned to collect his fruit from the vinedressers?

*When the landowner sent servants to collect fruit from the vinedressers they mistreated the servants.*

What did the vineyard owner do next?

*He sent more servants than before.*

How did the vinedressers respond to this group of servants?

*They mistreated the servants just like the first group.*



What did the landowner do last?

*He sent his son to the vinedressers. He thought that they would surely listen to his son.*

What did the vinedressers do to the landowner's son?

*They took the landowner's son out of the vineyard and killed him.*

What did the Pharisees say that the landowner would do to the vinedressers?

*They said that the landowner would kill the vinedressers and put new vinedressers in their place.*

What was Jesus saying that the Pharisees were like?

*He was saying that they were like the vinedressers in the story.*

## Presentation Ideas



### A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



### Crushed or Cracked

Demonstrate to the children the judgment that comes upon those who reject or oppose Christ (Matt. 21:44). Bring into class a large stone (at least the size of a brick), two easily breakable objects such as eggs, Christmas ornaments, or inexpensive teacups, and a deep bucket. Show the difference of how something is broken when it falls on the stone inside the bucket and how something is ground to powder when the stone falls on it inside the bucket. Warn the children that this is the picture that Jesus uses to describe how those who either are indifferent or opposed to Him are destroyed. Note: If using glass, make sure the students are a safe distance away.



### Teaching a Parable

Depending on the age of your children, teach the principle of the parable before the parable. While older children enjoy hearing the parable and what Jesus meant by it, young children have a difficult time connecting the parable with the truth that Jesus is teaching. A simple way to help these younger students is to tell them the truth Jesus wanted to teach, in this case, that rejecting God's Son will result in their judgment. Spend time explaining why God would judge them and what He would judge them for. Then tell the children that they are going to learn a story that Jesus told the people to help teach them this truth. This method can be used with every parable when teaching young children.



### Vine Wall Décor

Create the scene where this parable may have taken place. Use butcher paper and markers to create large stone walls. Allow the students to decorate this mural with paper leaves, grape vines, and grapes. Create a tower and a winepress where students can stomp "grapes."

## Praise and Worship

*Rock of My Salvation*

*As The Deer*

*Shine, Jesus Shine*

*Practice the Truth*

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

*“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” —Psalm 78:7*

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



### “Rejection Mobile”

Materials: copies of “Rejection Mobile” craft pages, four six-inch pieces of yarn, scissors, hole-punch, crayons, glue

Directions: Give each student a copy of the “Rejection Mobile” craft pages. Have them cut out each box and punch a hole where indicated. Next, have them color and cut out the ear, lips, and hands and glue the pieces to the back of the appropriate card. Finally, help them attach the cards in the correct order, by threading the yarn through the holes and tying.

### Coloring Pages

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.



### MEMORY VERSE

*“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” —Matthew 21:42b*

# Rejection Mobile

●  
**The Chief Priests  
and Pharisees Reject  
Jesus as God's Son**  
(Matt. 21:45–46)  
●

●  
“And when the chief priests and  
Pharisees **heard** His parables  
●

●  
“They understood that He was  
**speaking** about them.  
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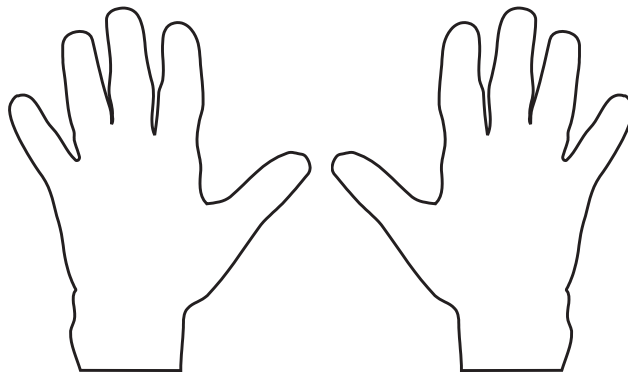


# Rejection Mobile

●

“And when they sought to **seize** Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet.”

●



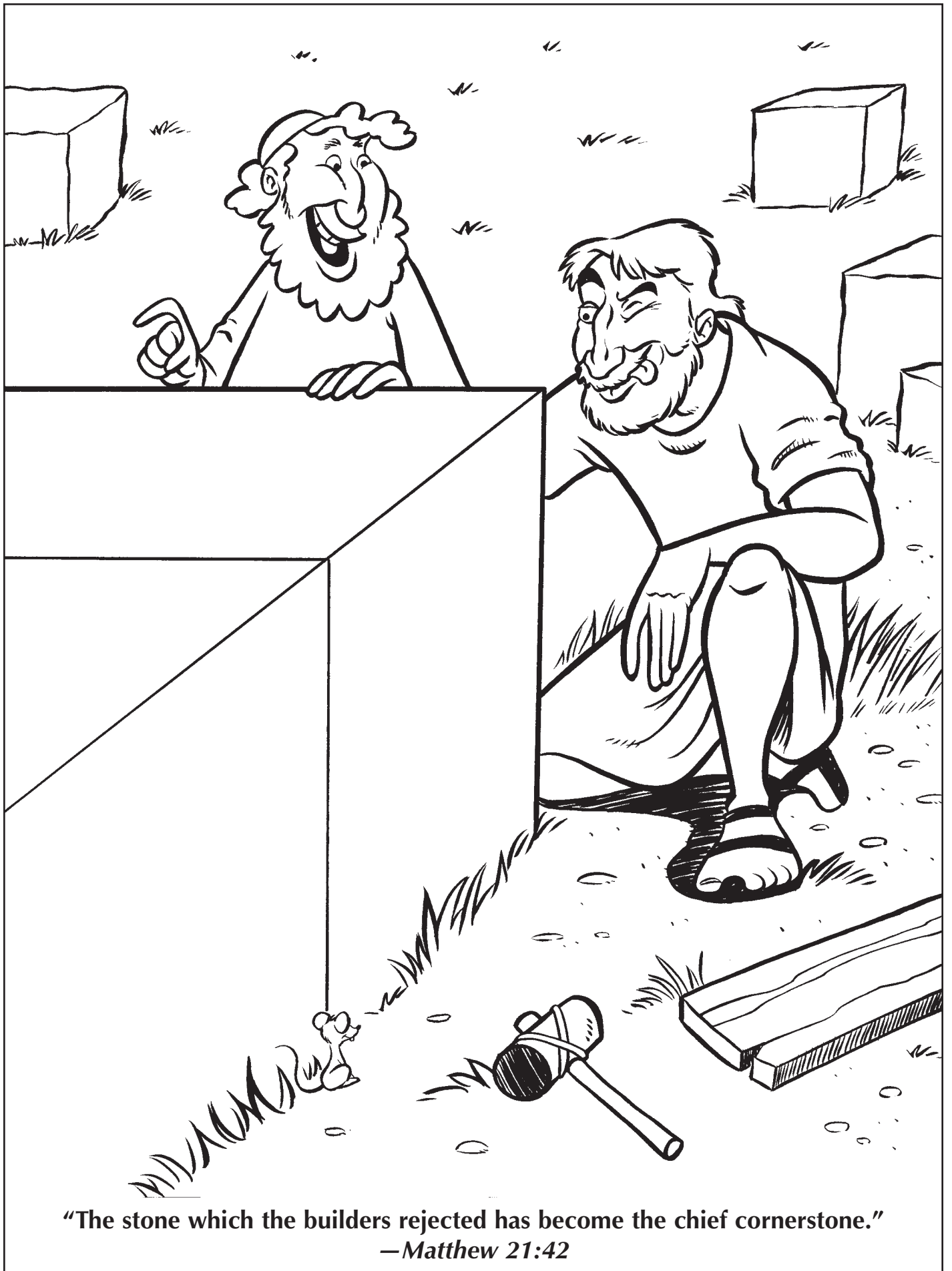




**Jesus confronted the Jewish leader's rejection of God's prophets and Messiah by telling them the parable of the landowner (Matt. 21:33–41).**







**"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."  
—Matthew 21:42**

