



# Jesus Confronts the Pharisees

Matthew 21:33–46



## LESSON OBJECTIVE

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

## LESSON GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Summarize how the Jewish leaders responded to Christ.
- Retell the parable of the landowner.
- Tell what lesson Jesus was teaching with the parable of the landowner.
- Explain in what ways Jesus is like a stone.

## 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.
- Rejoice that God resurrected and exalted Christ.
- 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



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level



## 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 rides 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!" (Matt. 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. If teachers are familiar with other Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah, they could 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 remember the most. Previous lessons describe John the Baptist's message and the response he received.



## 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. The teacher should 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.



### The Chief Cornerstone

Materials: papier-mache, strips of paper, large bowl, ball of newspaper or small balloon, verse sheet

Directions: Prepare a bowl of papier-mache. Give the students balls of crumpled newspaper or small balloons. Each student will be given the opportunity to make a rock at the beginning of today's class. After coating the paper strips with the papier-mache, and applying them to the balls of paper each student will have created his or her own rock. Glue the verse Matthew 21:42b, "The stone the builder's rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Make sure to do this craft at the beginning of the class time so that it will have enough time to dry.

## 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

#### Passage Outline

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

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

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

#### Reading of the Text

Read Matthew 21:33–46.

#### Introduction

Have you ever rejected someone or been rejected yourself? Rejection is an awful thing which has many negative consequences on other people. With rejection often comes hurt feelings, destroyed friendships, and even enemies are made. Yet among all its negative results there are even more severe consequences to rejection. In today's lesson this very serious rejection is illustrated. Jesus tells parable of the Tenants. Jesus tells this parable to the chief priests and scribes of his day. He warns them of the danger of rejecting Him as their Messiah. Let us now look into this parable and see the dangerous outcome of rejecting Christ.



#### Lead-off Questions (LOQs)

**LOQ:** What is the parable about in today's lesson?

**Answer:** The parable is about a landowner who owned a vineyard. While he was away on a journey, the landowner rented his vineyard to a group of farmers (or tenants). These tenants were put in charge of growing the grapes, harvesting the crop, and taking care of the vineyard while the landowner was away.

**LOQ:** What happened when the time came for the landowner to collect the fruits of his vineyard?

**Answer:** When the harvest time drew near, the landowner had sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruits. On two separate occasions the tenants rebelled against the landowner, beating, killing, and stoning the two groups of men that the landowner had sent to collect his fruit.

**LOQ:** How did the landowner respond to the tenants' rejection of his servants?

**Answer:** After having his two groups of His servants be rejected by the tenants, the landowner decides to send his son to collect what is rightfully his. He thought that the hired farmers would respect his own son for sure.



**LOQ:** How do the tenants of the vineyard receive the son of the landowner?

**Answer:** The tenants rejected the son of the landowner, killing him just as they had done with the landowner's servants before him. They did not want to submit to the authority of either the landowner or his son. The tenants just wanted the son's inheritance of the vineyard for themselves so they killed him.

**LOQ:** What does Jesus ask the chief priests and scribes at the end of his parable?

**Answer:** After telling them the parable, Jesus asks the chief priests and scribes what they think the landowner will do to the tenants who have rejected his son.

**LOQ:** What was the response of the chief priests and scribes to Jesus' question?

**Answer:** 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.

**LOQ:** What does their response to Jesus' question reveal about their understanding of the parable?

**Answer:** The chief priests and scribes' response to the question reveals that they did not yet understand the point of Jesus' parable. The chief priests and scribes were the wicked men in the parable that deserved to be destroyed. For many years they had beaten, stoned, and killed God's servants the prophets. Now that God had sent his Son Jesus among them, they were choosing to reject Him to. They had already planned how to kill him and in a couple of days they would murder Him outside the city.

**LOQ:** What does Jesus tell the chief priests and scribes after they had responded to His parable?

**Answer:** Jesus asks them if they have ever read a particular Scripture, which was found in Psalm 118. Jesus quoted a prophecy that pictures builders picking up stones to use for construction. The stone that they considered unworthy or unfit to be used in the end becomes the chief cornerstone of the whole building. What was once rejected to be used for the construction of the building becomes the most important stone of the whole construction. The chief priests and scribes would have been familiar with this Old Testament passage.

**LOQ:** How is this particular Psalm that Jesus quoted connected to the parable in today's lesson?

**Answer:** When Jesus was referring to the stone that was once rejected he was referring to himself. Like the son in the parable, Jesus had been sent by His Father and was now going to be rejected and killed by those that God had put in charge over the nation of Israel. Like the stone mentioned in the Psalm, this would not be the end of God's Son. Jesus, after being rejected by the leaders of Israel, would in the end become the chief cornerstone of God's church. Jesus was going to be the entire basis for which the God's people were to be restored and reestablished unto Himself.

**LOQ:** How does Jesus say God will judge the nation of Israel for rejecting His Son?

**Answer:** Israel was going to be judged for her rejection of the Messiah. Because they had refused to be obedient to God and bear the fruit of repentance, God

was going to give the kingdom of God to someone else who would be obedient. God was going to give the opportunity of obedience to the church, or the Gentiles. This church continues on today, bearing the fruits of obedience and repentance unto God.

**LOQ:** How does Jesus say He is going to judge individual people?

**Answer:** Jesus said, "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but He on whom it falls will be crushed." Christ here again speaks of Himself as being a stone. In the end, those who reject Christ's demand of obedience will be destroyed. Jesus will judge each person that does not bear the fruit of repentance.

**LOQ:** In the end, do the chief priests and scribes respond to the parable by accepting Jesus as their Messiah?

**Answer:** After the parable, and the things that Jesus had said to them, the chief priests and scribes knew that He was talking about them. They now understood that 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 they would be crushed, the chief priests and scribes still refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah. They would have nothing to do with the obedience and repentance that He demanded.

### Summary

In today's lesson, Jesus tells the chief priests and scribes a parable to warn them of the danger of rejecting Christ. In the parable of the tenants, Jesus exposed the leader's habit of rejecting God's servants. Because of their rejection of God's king, the leaders were on the verge of being destroyed themselves. If they would not be obedient to Jesus' demand for repentance submission to Himself, then they were going to be judged both as a nation and as individuals. God would take away the kingdom of God away from the nation of Israel and give it someone who would bear the fruit of repentance. Jesus would judge all those who do not take the responsibility of obeying Him and repenting of their sin. In the end those who reject Christ will be destroyed.

### Application

Although He was rejected many years ago by the nation of Israel, Jesus now stands resurrected and exalted before God. All people everywhere are now faced with the decision of whether or not they are going to repent of their sin and follow Christ. If one rejects Christ's demand for obedience, he or she will be destroyed. But if one submits to Him and receives Him as Lord, they will be given the gift of salvation. All those who have chosen to follow Him today should demonstrate their salvation by bearing fruit and telling others of the danger of coming judgment.

### 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. Create out of butcher paper and markers large stone walls. Allow the students to decorate this mural with paper leaves, grape vines and grapes. Teachers can also 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

*"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.



### **"Jesus Confronts the Pharisees"**

Use this worksheet to reinforce the key truths of today's lesson. The worksheet is located at the back of the lesson.

### **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.  
●



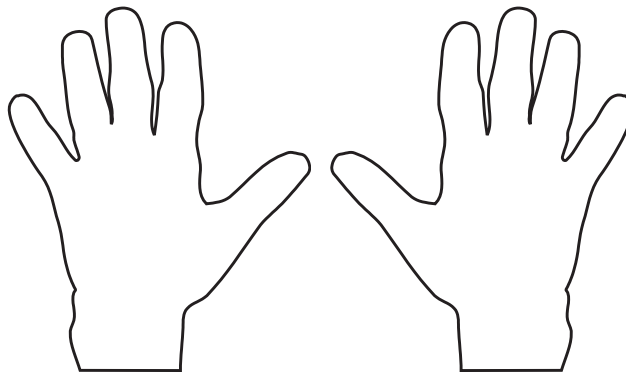
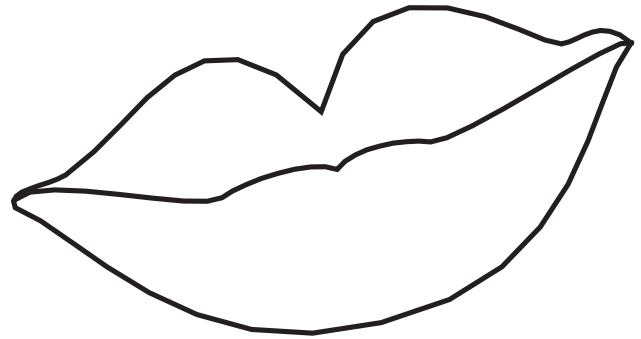


# Rejection Mobile

●

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

●





# Jesus confronts the Pharisees



Matthew 21:33-46

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. In the parable, who is the landowner? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. David
  - b. Son of David
  - c. God
  - d. Moses
  
2. True or False: The vinedressers were good people. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What did the vinedressers do to the servants? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. The beat one.
  - b. They killed one.
  - c. They stoned one.
  - d. all of the above
  
4. What did the vinedressers do to the landowner's son? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. True or False: The Pharisees said the vinedressers were wicked men that should be destroyed. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Who was the stone that the builders rejected? \_\_\_\_\_





**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**

