

REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH KING

Matthew 21:23-46

Yeshua §138

As Jesus returns to Jerusalem on day two, Jewish leaders come after Jesus trying to discredit Him in the eyes of the crowds and trying to catch or trap Jesus in something they can use to accuse Him before the Romans.

On day two, when Jesus returned to the Temple compound a delegation of the Jewish leadership confronted Jesus and demanded to know who had given Him authority to clear the Temple the day before.

JESUS' AUTHORITY QUESTIONED (21:23-27)

The chief priests and elders controlled what happened in the Temple area. They allowed and profited from the merchants and moneychangers operating in the Temple area. By clearing the Temple, Jesus challenged their authority and asserted His own.

Jesus responded to their question with one of His own. This was a common rabbinic debate technique. By referring to John's baptism, Jesus meant everything associated with John's baptism: his whole message and ministry. John could not have been more clear in his testimony concerning Jesus (John 1:19-34). If the chief priests and elders recognized John's authority as from God, they would have had to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah King and His authority from God.

But if they answered John's ministry was from man, they knew the people would rise up against them, because the people regarded John as a true prophet from God. The chief priests and elders were not going to risk the ire¹ of the people. They refused to answer Jesus' question.

The chief priests and elders cared nothing for truth. Their commitment was to protect their power. They were purely political. Their refusal to answer Jesus gave Jesus grounds to refuse them an answer without losing face or credibility with the crowd.

Jesus proceeded to tell three parables critical of the chief priests and elders.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS (21:28-32)

Tax collectors and prostitutes were the dregs of Jewish society. Though they originally said "no" to God, they repented at the preaching of John the Baptizer and the preaching of Jesus. It is the tax collectors and prostitutes, not the chief priests and elders, who ultimately did God's will. Consequently, by their faith, tax collectors and prostitutes were coming into God's kingdom before the chief priests and the elders. The chief priests and elders could still come into the kingdom if they too, would repent and believe John and Jesus. But it wasn't looking good; they refused to believe John the Baptizer even though John came preaching and doing what was right. Seeing the transformative impact of John's ministry on the tax collectors and prostitutes should have changed their minds about John, but it didn't.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANT FARMERS 21:33-46

It is generally accepted that the *vineyard* is the nation Israel and the *master* is God (e.g. Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-16). The *tenants* represent Israel's leaders. The *servants* represent the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah etc. Historically, Israel's leaders had beaten and killed various prophets. The chief priests and elders are descended from those who reject God's authority and God's messengers.

¹ Anger

Finally, the master sends his son. The *son* represents the Messiah. On several occasions, Jesus revealed to His disciples that the Jewish leaders would kill Him (16:21; 17:23; 20:18). Now He announced this to the leaders themselves and the people. He also announced the master will replace those tenants with other tenants who will give the master his due.

Jesus changed the figure from a vineyard to a building with His statement about the cornerstone. This quotation is from Psalm 118:22-23. It probably originally described David. All of Israel's leaders, including the prophet Samuel and Saul, initially rejected David; but God chose him and made him the *cornerstone* of the nation Israel. Similarly, these leaders in Jesus' day, have rejected the greater Son of David, Jesus (Matt. 12:12-32). But God will make Him the *cornerstone* of His building, which may be Israel or God's kingdom. This reversal of fortunes from rejection to exaltation is God's doing and causes God's people to marvel at the plan and work of God.

God is going to take away the authority and responsibility of the chief priests and elders to advance God's kingdom. He will give that authority and responsibility to another people. This probably refers to believers in the Church. Initially it probably refers to the faithful Jewish remnant represented by Jesus' apostles, the New Testament prophets, and the elders of the first generation of the Church. This in no way teaches the Church replaces Israel in God's program. Verse 43 makes clear anyone who opposes Jesus will fail. This will certainly be true of the chief priests and elders.

They got the message, but surrounded by the crowd, they couldn't do anything to Jesus on day two. They would have to wait for a different opportunity.

As the Jewish leadership seeks to find fault in Jesus, they will fail. He turns the tables on them and reveals their wicked character. As the Passover Lamb without blemish, they will fail to find any moral or spiritual flaw in Jesus. In the end, they will resort to lies and political pressure to bring about His death.

In these days of apostasy, take courage that no earthly power can oppose the plan and purpose of God. Jesus will always prevail. Even though we must go through times of testing and tribulation, and the days are dark and full of grief, unlike the leaders of Israel, we are on the right side of history. Unlike the leaders of Israel and all who oppose Jesus, we will not be crushed by the *Cornerstone* for the *Cornerstone* is the Rock of our Salvation (Psalm 62:1-2).

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