

FAQ VOL II

A WORK IN PROGRESS

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

VOLUME II

© John Kimball McKee

latest update 08 November, 2024

All rights reserved. With the exception of quotations for academic purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

A planned resource by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries
P.O. Box 516
McKinney, Texas 75070
(407) 933-2002

outreachisrael.net / outreachisrael.blog
messianicapologetics.net / messianicapologetics.blog

Fair Use Notice: This publication contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We make use of this material as a matter of teaching, scholarship, research, and commentary. We believe in good faith that this constitutes a “fair use” of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law, and is in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. For more information go to: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/17/107>

Outreach Israel Ministries is a non-profit 501(c)3. All prices listed on the publications of Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics are suggested donations.

<p><i>Frequently Asked Questions, Volume II is a multi-year work in progress. Please note how the text may be corrected, updated, or amended, before final publication. Page numbers are also likely to be altered.</i></p>
--

Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	JBK: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Koren</i> (2000)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Ara: Aramaic	KJV: King James Version
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	LES: <i>Lexham English Septuagint</i> (2019)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	LS: <i>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LSJM: <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CGL: <i>Cambridge Greek Lexicon</i> (2021)	MT: Masoretic Text
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Holladay)	NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1977)
CJB: <i>Complete Jewish Bible</i> (1998)	NASU: <i>New American Standard Update</i> (1995)
CJSB: <i>Complete Jewish Study Bible</i> (2016)	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NEB: <i>New English Bible</i> (1970)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NETS: <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: <i>English Standard Version</i> (2001)	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: <i>New International Version</i> (1984)
GNT: <i>Greek New Testament</i>	NJB: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic</i> (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: <i>Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> (1999)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NKJV: <i>New King James Version</i> (1982)
HCSB: <i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> (2004)	NRSV: <i>New Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
Heb: Hebrew	NLT: <i>New Living Translation</i> (1996)
HNV: <i>Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible</i>	NT: <i>New Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	

OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Parable of the Vineyard-Landowner-Wicked Tenants, Replacement Theology

Is it irrefutably true that the Messiah said that the Kingdom would be transferred from the Jewish people, to the Gentile Church?

Some have indeed said that the parable of the vineyard-landowner-wicked tenants in Matthew 21:33-46, provides irrefutable evidence that God is finished with His covenant with Israel and the Jewish people, and that the Gentile Christian Church is a kind of “New Israel.”¹ The statement of Matthew 21:43 is specifically, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (2011 NIV). Only by reviewing the parable of the vineyard-landowner-wicked tenants, can anyone deduce for certain whether or not the God of Israel has finished with the people of Israel **or** if the Messiah had something more targeted in view:

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER [Isaiah 5:1-2], and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?’ They said to Him, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons.’ Yeshua said to them, ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES” [Psalm 118:22-23]? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.’ When the chief priests and the Pharisees

¹ Much of this FAQ entry was the result of viewing the following Instagram short by the channel lordsparable (30 May, 2024) <<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C7msd4kJvvy/?igsh=MW5qOXk3YXdxMjlnQ%3D%3D>>.

Parable of the Vineyard-Landowner-Wicked Tenants, Replacement Theology

heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet” (Matthew 21:33-46, NASU).

A wider series of preceding statements, provides some context for what it meant for the Kingdom of God to be given over to another (Matthew 21:43). Those who were being addressed by the Messiah were chief priests and Pharisees (Matthew 21:45), religious leaders of the Jewish people in the Second Temple era—who were stated to have feared the people, who considered Yeshua to be a prophet (Matthew 21:46). So, it is inappropriate to assume that Israel proper or the Jewish people as a whole were being chastised or admonished here.

To summarize the parable, God as Landowner planted a vineyard, with vinegrowers given the responsibly to tend it (Matthew 21:33). This is representative of the Kingdom of God being led by religious leaders such as the chief priests and Pharisees, whose duty it was to properly care for His chosen people. It is sadly witnessed that as groups of slaves or servants were sent to receive the produce the vinegrowers were responsible for, i.e., evaluate the labor of the religious leaders, that they were beaten and killed (Matthew 21:34-36). This could be representative of various Prophets throughout the history of Ancient Israel, who were sent to issue messages of repentance. More recently for the time, it would have involved how figures like John the Immerser/Baptist proclaimed inconvenient messages, especially to those in religious and political leadership. Finally, though, the son is sent, with the expectation from the landowner that the vinegrowers would respect him (Matthew 21:37). Instead the vinegrowers killed him desiring to seize his inheritance (Matthew 21:38-39). This was doubtlessly a foreshadowing of the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah, and how the Jewish religious leaders would oversee His death.

When questioned by the Lord about what would happen when the landowner would come (Matthew 21:40), the chief priests and Pharisees answered, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end...and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time” (Matthew 21:41, 2011 NIV). Yeshua associated such persons with the builders who rejected the cornerstone (Matthew 21:42), by quoting Psalm 118:22-23, and then making the direct statement: **“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits”** (Matthew 21:43, ESV). Yeshua, being the Chief Cornerstone, will especially crush those He falls upon (Matthew 21:44). The chief priests and Pharisees hearing Him were astute enough to recognize how His words were directed to them (Matthew 21:45), with it being narrated, “They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet” (Matthew 21:46, 2011 NIV).

How is the parable of the vineyard-landowner-wicked tenants to be interpreted and applied? Does it actually speak of the Messiah terminating His Father’s covenant with Israel proper and the Jewish people? Or were the Messiah’s words targeted against the leadership

of the chief priests and Pharisees, who were said to have wanted to seize Him? Much indeed comes down to how one approaches Matthew 21:43:

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43, RSV)

It is difficult to deny how there is a long history of supersessionist interpretation of this passage, over many centuries! Throughout a great deal of historical Christianity, it has been concluded from Matthew 21:43, that the Messiah said that the Kingdom of God would be transferred from Israel proper or the Jewish people, to the Christian Church (perhaps as some New Israel).

Up until more modern times, it can be frequently suggested that the sphere of influence regarding God’s salvation, has shifted from an Israel proper which rejected the Messiah—and where God’s work of salvation has widely ceased—to now the Christian Church.² The underlying Greek of Matthew 21:43, *kai dothēsetai ethnei poiounti tous karpous autēs*, “and it will be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Brown and Comfort),³ is frequently connected to 1 Peter 2:9 and its reference to all Believers composing “a holy nation” (*ethnos hagion*). It is concluded that Israel proper’s privileges have ceased, with Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Messiah being God’s *new* holy people via the emergence of “the Church.”

To be sure, supersessionist approaches to Matthew 21:33-46, and especially Matthew 21:43, have been reevaluated, criticized, and modified by various evangelical Protestant commentators. **Was this parable directed to all of Israel proper, the Jewish people as a whole, or was it limited to solely the Jewish religious leaders?** While recognizing that the chief priests and Pharisees were the audience in view, chastised by Yeshua, supersessionist approaches would extrapolate this as them representing Israel proper or the Jewish people as a whole. Non-supersessionist approaches would see the Jewish religious and political establishment being rebuked by the Messiah. As is seen in the annotation provided by the *NIV First-Century Study Bible*, “The chief priests and Pharisees rightly understood that Jesus was threatening to throw them out of the vineyard,”⁴ as they would be the vinegrowers in the parable. The vineyard itself would have represented the people and/or the Kingdom of God to be serviced by such vinegrowers. That the chief priests and Pharisees would no longer have the same prominence in the Kingdom, now that Yeshua was on the scene, is fairly deduced.

² Cf. R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 312; Leon Morris, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 544.

³ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 83.

⁴ Kent Dobson, *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context*, 2011 NIV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1226.

Parable of the Vineyard-Landowner-Wicked Tenants, Replacement Theology

In his Matthew commentary, D.A. Carson (1984) indicated how the Messiah's statements were principally focused on the Jewish religious leadership:

"Up to this time the Jewish religious leaders were the principal means by which God exercised his reign over his people. But the leaders failed so badly in handling God's 'vineyard' and rejecting God's Son that God gave the responsibility to another people who would produce the kingdom's fruit (cf. 7:16-20)...Strictly speaking, then, v.43 does not speak of transferring the locus of the people of God from Jews to Gentiles, though it may hint at this insofar as that locus now extends far beyond the authority of the Jewish rulers (cf. Acts 13:46; 18:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9); instead, it speaks of ending the role the Jewish religious leaders played in mediating God's authority..." (EXP).⁵

A few additional evangelical commentators, have been careful to stress from Matthew 21:43 how God is not finished with Israel proper or the Jewish people, although from different vantage points. Michael J. Wilkins (2004) seemingly concludes that while the central locus for God's salvation activity, at present, is not Israel—that one cannot conclude from Matthew 21:43 that Israel proper or the Jewish people are completely irrelevant for God's future plan. In his estimation,

"The role of carrying out God's purposes through the kingdom of God has been taken away from the nation of Israel in the present age, and Jesus' disciples currently enjoy both the blessings of the kingdom of God and the responsibility of carrying the message of the gospel of the kingdom (21:43; 28:18-20). But Israel is still kept in view as receiving in the future the fulfillment of the promises of the kingdom (10:23; 23:37-39; cf. Rom. 11:25-32; 15:7-13; Rev. 7:1-8). Jesus' disciples represent the fulfillment in part of the promises to Israel, and they now perform the role that Israel performed, but they do not replace Israel or become Israel."⁶

Grant R. Osborne (2010) concludes that the intention of Matthew 21:43 is to stress how there is not a supersessionism or replacement theology intended by the Messiah's word. Non-Jewish Believers do not replace Israel proper as God's people, but join in with them, noting Paul's analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11. Instead, Osborne indicates how Matthew's Gospel placed the Jewish people at the center of Yeshua's mission:

"...Many classical dispensationalists make this the classical text for Jesus withdrawing his offer of the kingdom from the Jewish people, inaugurating the church age. This in turn produces a replacement theology, where the church replaces Israel as the people of God. However, this does not fit Matthew or the rest of the NT.

⁵ D.A. Carson, "Matthew," in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:454.

⁶ Michael J. Wilkins, *NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 706.

“It is clear that the Gentiles do not replace Israel but join Israel as the people of God. In Rom 11, only ‘some of’ the Jewish people (i.e., those who reject the Messiah) are removed from the olive tree, and the Gentiles join the ‘remnant’ (believing Jews as God’s people). Moreover, Matthew has the Jewish people the focus of Jesus’ mission (10:5-6; 15:24) and in 28:19 the Jews are part of the ‘nations’ to be evangelized by his followers.”⁷

It is appreciable that there are evangelical examiners who recognize that Matthew 21:43 should not be taken in the direction of some widescale replacement of Israel proper or the Jewish people, by the Christian Church. They are to be commended for recognizing how God still has a future intention for Israel in the eschaton. But what have Messianic commentators said about Matthew 21:43, surely recognizing the long history of Christian supersessionism associated with this passage?

In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (updated 2023), David H. Stern is rightly seen to protest the supersessionist view that God is finished with Israel proper or the Jewish people. Instead, he concludes how the focus of Yeshua’s words was on the Jewish religious leaders, and how their main function was shifting toward His own Jewish disciples as leaders. Stern also points out how various non-Jewish Messiah followers would also serve with them as leaders:

“Yeshua is not saying the Christians will replace the Jews as God’s people, as many Christians teach. Rather he is warning that Jewish leaders who do not look out for God’s interests (vv. 33-42) will be deprived of sharing in his rulership; and this task, with its rewards, will fall to a different group of Jewish leaders, the Messianic Jewish *talmidim* caring for Yeshua’s Messianic Community (see 18:18-20&N). Before long, of course, this community comes to include Gentile Christians, some of whom become leaders too” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*).⁸

Barney Kasdan is seen in his 2011 commentary *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah* to rightly protest supersessionist or replacement theology interpretations of Matthew 21:43. He properly affirms, on the basis of the Jeremiah 31 New Covenant and Romans 11 expectations, that God is hardly finished with Israel proper or the Jewish people. He concludes that what Yeshua intended, specifically in speaking about the cornerstone being rejected by the builders, was a postponement of the fulfillment of Israel’s Kingdom promises. This might be affected by some commitment, though, on Kasdan’s part, to various dispensational and pre-tribulation rapture presuppositions:

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 791.

⁸ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: An updated Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 2023), 61.

“We should carefully note here that this is not a passage which teaches ‘replacement theology,’ that the Kingdom was taken from the Jewish people and given to the Gentile church. Although this is a popular teaching present in many church circles today, it cannot be justified based on the entire context of Scripture. There are too many verses in the New Covenant affirming that while Israel may be largely in unbelief regarding Yeshua, the promises of God stand firm in regard to his covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-36; Romans 11:1-5, 25-29).

“How can one reconcile these verses with the theory of replacement theology? The obvious reconciliation of all these passages is for us to be the ‘kind of people’ who produce good fruit, not as the Gentile branch of the church, but with the faithful remnant of Jews who receive the beauties of the New Covenant by their personal faith in Yeshua as Messiah. No doubt there will be many from the Nations who will also embrace Yeshua as the message goes out to them. The immediate context of this parable is that the vineyard applies to Israel. The message is not about a replacement of Israel here, but a postponement of the fulfillment until all Israel is ready to receive the true King Messiah. In particular, Yeshua seems to focus the statement on the religious leaders (the builders of Judaism) who ironically rejected the very cornerstone of the faith (Yeshua as King Messiah). The analogy is striking. One can imagine an entire building (probably the Temple itself) built up as walls, roofs, pillars, etc. Yet it is all glaringly missing the very cornerstone of the foundation!”⁹

How should today’s Messianic people approach the statement of Matthew 21:43, “Therefore I tell you, God’s Kingdom will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation producing its fruit” (WMB)? It should seem pretty clear enough that a widespread transfer of God’s intentions with Israel proper or the Jewish people, to some Christian Church as a New Israel, is unwarranted. The vineyard described by Yeshua in Matthew 21:33-41 is composed of the people of Israel, with the vinegrowers being the chief priests and Pharisees (Matthew 21:45), the religious leaders. Because of the religious leaders’ rejection of Yeshua as Cornerstone (Matthew 21:42; Psalm 118:22-23), this main responsibility would be transferred to “a nation that bears the fruits of the Realm” (Moffatt New Testament).

Given the likely association between Matthew 21:43 and 1 Peter 2:9, the main center of responsibility *for leadership* in God’s Kingdom has been transferred to Yeshua’s own Jewish disciples and other Messiah followers (cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:18). **Their responsibility is to further the intentions of salvation history, involving the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel** (cf. Acts 1:6) **and the co-participation of Believers from the nations within such restoration.**¹⁰ This is actually what we see going on in much of the contemporary Messianic movement, with Jewish and non-Jewish Believers working together as “one new

⁹ Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2011), pp 245-246.

¹⁰ To be sure, there are additional matters to be probed from Matthew 23:2-3, where Yeshua is seen to ascribe some level of ongoing halachic authority to the Pharisees, while avoiding matters of spiritual hypocrisy. This is discussed in the author’s article “Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*).

Parable of the Vineyard-Landowner-Wicked Tenants, Replacement Theology

man/humanity” (Ephesians 2:15), participating in the Messianic mission, being concerned with Jewish outreach and evangelism, and in heralding the return of Israel’s Messiah.