



Luke 20:1-19.

Accountable for Our Actions

February 28, 2010. Copyright © 2010, John W. (Jack) Carter
www.biblicaltheology.com Scripture quotes from KJV

Are there consequences that result from our attitudes and actions? What are the consequences of our refusal to submit our lives to God, the One who loves us and created us? We find many examples in scripture of those who suffered for the consequences of their actions. This study looks at the relationship of Israel to its original calling from God, the way Israel and its religious leaders wandered from that calling, and the price that is paid by those who did not recognize their accountability to God, and as a result, suffer serious consequences.

At this point, Jesus has completed his three years of ministry in the region of Galilee, and has entered the city of Jerusalem where in a few days He will suffer the Passion. Upon his coming to Jerusalem, many of those who trusted in Him assumed that He would use His power to depose the Roman puppet-government, and restore the Kingdom of David. Much of Jesus' teaching that followed in those last few days centered around His true purpose, the nature of the Kingdom of God that He did come to establish, and the need for us to listen, understand, and respond positively to His message.

Luke 19:45-48. *And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; ⁴⁶Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. ⁴⁷And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, ⁴⁸And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.*

The people expected Jesus to enter Jerusalem and throw out the government. They were quite satisfied with the way things were going concerning the temple and its use. Consequently, Jesus' actions were not entirely understood. Jesus did two things here that caused Jewish leaders to question His authority:

(1) Rather than throw the puppet government out on the street, Jesus threw the moneychangers and temple merchants out of the temple courtyard where their commercial use of the Court of the Gentiles prevented the worship of God that was intended to be possible there.

(2) He also began to teach in the temple courtyard. It was one thing for this "untrained and unordained" preacher to be teaching in the local synagogues, away from the temple guard and away from the Jerusalem Jews. It was quite

another to be teaching in the temple itself. He had none of the credentials that the Jerusalem Jews considered worthy of the post, and he was teaching the scriptures with a familiarity and authority that had never been experienced. Furthermore, His message was critical of the current state of Israel.

What was the response of the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the religious leaders to Jesus' actions? The hatred they felt toward Jesus' message had set them against Him early in His ministry, and now that Jesus was bringing His message into the temple itself, they took their threats to kill him to the next level: they conspired together to arrange His death. This sets the stage for the conflict to come. Jesus would confront the religious leaders in a way that would expose their hypocrisy.

We find it easy to criticize Israel for wandering away from their calling. We point fingers at their rebellion, and easily criticize their religious leaders. Many people erroneously blame the Jews for killing Jesus, not understanding that Jesus gave His life as a ransom. The consequences of Israel's continued apostasy is a theme that is woven through their entire history. Israel, as God's chosen people, did not fulfill their call to be a kingdom of priests to the world, so at His appointed time God took this call openly and fully to others when Jesus swung wide the already open door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Luke 20:1-2. *And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, ²And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?*

We see here an example of the conflict that Jesus' message generated. Again, Jesus is bringing his message to the people within the temple court in Jerusalem, a practice that was common until the merchants took it over. What do you suppose would happen if someone off of the street, someone with no credentials, entered a classroom in one of our public schools and started teaching students what would be considered controversial and socially inflammatory material? Certainly, security personnel would be contacted and the individual would be immediately removed, forcibly if necessary, and charged with trespassing and any number of additional violations. Why would the purported "teacher" be removed in this manner? We would agree that the individual did not have the authority to teach in the classroom when he/she lacks the credentials to do so.

Who gives teachers the authority to teach? The community sets standards of education and certification that are required. Likewise, the Jerusalem Jews had in their mind a system of authority that they defined and controlled, a system that made all of the decisions in religious affairs, particularly those pertaining to the

temple. Consequently, the first response of the Jerusalem leadership to Jesus' actions would be to challenge His authority.

Things really have not changed that much. What would we do if a stranger entered our church, stepped into the pulpit on a Sunday morning, and started teaching doctrine that was in stark conflict with our traditional beliefs? Likewise, the individual would be removed. By who's authority does a Bible teacher or pastor teach in the church? Just as we do in education, we certify those who we appoint as teachers in the church body. The congregation ordains its pastors and priests through a process similar to that done in the secular education field. Evidence of call, religious education, and ordination to the post are universally applied across Christian denominations as it seeks to place in service those who are acceptable to hold traditional mores.

Consequently, the Jerusalem Jews were within their proper rights to confront Jesus as He was teaching in the temple. The maintenance of peace in the temple, as well as the maintenance of their held beliefs was their responsibility. They had been appointed the authority to police the temple environment. However, Jesus saw through their words and was aware of the attitude they had towards him. They were blinded by their own legalism, and their own thirst for power as they ignored the truth of God's purpose, were consequently hypocritical, and left themselves open to exposure.

Luke 20:3-7. *And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: ⁴The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? ⁵And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? ⁶But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. ⁷And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was.*

As usual, God's wisdom is evident in Jesus' responses to questions. The question that Jesus asked of the leaders was really the same question they had asked Him. Their response to the question would reveal their lack of sincerity because, though they tolerated John's ministry in order to keep peace, they fully rejected his message, particularly notable is John's pointing to Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus was also setting the stage for those who would listen and come to understand the true source of spiritual authority. For the Jerusalem Jews, all spiritual authority was held in the hand of man, and specifically in the hands of the temple leadership. This is a tragically common error in today's church, an error that keeps many church congregations from accomplishing the purposes of God as they, like the Jerusalem Jews, replace the Lordship of Christ in the

church with their own. The message of "who is in charge" is as relevant for the church today as it was in the ancient Jerusalem temple.

Luke 20:8. *And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

Jesus' response to them is intriguing. Though the grammar of Jesus' statement implies that He would not tell them, in the upcoming parable He actually does so. One of the important properties of parables is their universal application to the context of their teaching. That is, the message of the parable always answers questions that are posed immediately prior to their presentation. Why, do you suppose, Jesus did not clearly and directly answer their question the way they wanted? If Jesus simply denounced the leadership of the temple, only conflict would result, for such an approach does not change the heart of those who are in sin: it only enrages them. Likewise, when we approach similar situations today, wisdom and love needs to be engaged before any action is taken. Jesus used a better way to expose the hypocrisy of the Jerusalem Jews: rather than denounce their error publicly, He taught the truth in a less direct way to those who would listen and in a way that those who chose to hear would listen and understand.

Luke 20:9. *Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.*

The first part of this sentence clearly implies that what is taking place was immediately following the previous verse. The religious leaders are hearing the parable. By speaking the parable to the people Jesus was avoiding direct confrontation with the religious leaders, and instead exposing their hypocrisy to any who would understand. The presence of many followers provided Jesus with protection in the same way that John was protected by them.

"A certain man planted a vineyard." The vineyard was a symbol of Israel . The imagery that Jesus used was an integral part of their idiomatic culture.

Isaiah 5:1-5. *Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: ²And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. ³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. ⁴What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*

How did God judge the disobedience and arrogance of His vineyard, Israel? Isaiah prophesied that God would remove the wall, the hedge, the protection that He provided around Israel. The Old Testament books of the Kings and Chronicles record this removal of the hedge, enabled the neighboring warlords to invade and conquer both Israel and Judah. In Mark's depiction of this parable, it is evident that the planter of the vineyard built it with much care.

Mark 12:1. *And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winevat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.*

The landowner had built a completely working vineyard, probably more complete and operational than most that they knew. According to this verse, the vintner provided for its protection, built the means for its fruitfulness, and the tower that allowed them to see over the hedge and warn them of coming enemies, and also gave them the opportunity to see his return.

The vineyard is Israel. The farmers to whom the vintner rented the vineyard are the ones given the stewardship of the vineyard, the stewardship of Israel, the Jerusalem leadership. They were to be obedient to their master as they protected the vineyard, cultivated its crop, and enabled the vineyard to bear fruit so that the master would experience gain from the enterprise. Israel as a nation of priests was blessed by God for the purpose of fruit-bearing. However, rather than bear fruit, Israel used the blessings of God as a means to withdraw within themselves and treat all others with racial hatred. They replaced the love of God with a burdensome religion of works that they themselves both administered and could not follow. God was not part of the program. This was not what God intended for Israel.

The owner of the vineyard went away for a long time. This is probably the time from Abraham to Jesus, the time when God's chosen people were accountable to Him, and demonstrated their hatred of God by their continued apostasy and bigotry.

Luke 20:10. *And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty.*

The owner of the vineyard was certainly within his rights to request delivery of the fruit of the vineyard when it was ripe. After all, that was the purpose of the vineyard and its produce is the specific duty of the husbandmen. For the stewards to reject the master would be unheard of in their culture. The servant-messenger allegorically refers to any of the many prophets sent to Israel to demand their accountability. What does history tell us of the treatment that the

prophet received? Every one of the prophets were rejected, persecuted, and several were ultimately killed.

Luke 11:48-51. *Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. ⁴⁸Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. ⁴⁹Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: ⁵⁰That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; ⁵¹From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.*

The hypocrisy of man is clearly evident in Jesus' statement. The people build a great system of veneration of the prophets, yet they themselves killed them, and would also kill any prophet who came to them today. Their veneration is in tradition, not in their hearts. The message of the prophets has been summarily rejected, even though they pretend that these "men of God" are respected. The current generation of Jerusalem Jews is just as responsible for the abuse of the prophets as is the generations that performed the abuse, simply because the heart of man has not changed.

Little has changed today. Churches that are run by men repeatedly persecute and chase away their pastors whose message they reject. They cannot stand to have their authority challenged. However, the fruit of the vineyard does not belong to the husbandman. The Lordship of the church belongs to Jesus and is empowered through the hearts of every believer, not through a few who think they are in charge.

Luke 20:11. *And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty.*

The owner of the vineyard gave the tenants yet another opportunity to fulfill their obligation of stewardship. What does this demonstrate about God? God is far more patient with us than we are with His messengers. What did the tenants do to the second servant? The parable illustrates that they beat him and treated him shamefully, and of course they did not give the fruit of the vineyard to the master. The nature of the shameful treatment of the servant is not described, but it is evident that they treated him worse than the first servant. Once we have committed an act against God, it is easier to re-commit that act, and to increase its severity.

Luke 20:12. *And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.*

There is a great significance concerning the sending of a third messenger. The testimony of a single witness was not to be considered significant in a matter of legal importance. The testimony of two was to be considered, but only the testimony of three or more witnesses was able to convict.

Deuteronomy 19:15. *One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*

By going to the third servant, three witness had now been sent to the vineyard carrying the authority of the owner, demanding their stewardship. They rejected all three. Their rejection would now be subject to indictment in a court of law. The stewards stand guilty before the owner of the vineyard.

Jeremiah 7:25-27. *Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: ²⁶Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. ²⁷Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee.*

Jeremiah 25:4-9. *And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. ⁵They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: ⁶And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. ⁷Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. ⁸Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, ⁹Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.*

The tenants were unfaithful stewards. God expects all Christians to be faithful stewards, tending His mission in His behalf. What has God given us to accomplish this task? God has provided us with gifts, talents, callings, opportunities, material possessions, ministers and leaders, etc., that are to be

brought under the authority and power of the Holy Spirit in order to exercise God's mission. It is when we leave the authority and power of the Holy Spirit out of the process that we end up with flesh-led congregations and powerless churches. How does God expect us to treat those who faithfully serve Him? It is obvious that it is not God's purpose that His messengers would be persecuted and killed, but rather that they would be treated with generous and loving support.

Luke 20:13. *Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.*

The words, "Son, whom I love (NIV)" is from a single Greek word which is also translated, "beloved son (KJV)", and "one and only son." The implication is that it is the only son of the owner. Clearly, Jesus is referring to Himself in this allegory. An example of the same word is in Luke, chapter 3:

Luke 3:22. *And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.*

When the vineyard owner sent his son, he was offering the tenants their last chance to fulfill their covenant with their owner, an opportunity for complete forgiveness for their apostasy. Jesus was proclaiming to the religious leaders through the ears of the people that He was their last chance, and that through Him forgiveness could be found. Through Him all of the transgressions of the past could come to an end. No additional messenger would come. Such an argument clearly declared to them that Jesus is the Messiah they are waiting for.

However, Jesus is not the Messiah that they want or expect. This Messiah challenged their authority over other men and over the tabernacle of God. What do you suppose is going through the minds of the religious leaders right about now? They probably want to attack and kill Jesus immediately. Their desire for His death is probably on their minds as they are trying to come up with some means to destroy Jesus without inciting the people.

Luke 20:14. *But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.*

As plots to kill Jesus are going through the minds of the Jerusalem Jews, Jesus reveals the plot to kill the son of the vintner. The stewards were thinking that through the death of the messenger's son they might receive the inheritance for themselves. Of course, the people who were all very familiar with the traditions of inheritance would see this thought as ridiculous, as no master would give his

inheritance to those who murder his son. What we see here is a conflict of authority. Again, the tenants represent the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They want to keep their status as the supreme spiritual authority. They want the people to continue to think that they themselves are holy and righteous. Their antipathy of God's plan is not much different than the traditional story of the fall of Lucifer, in which he rebelled against God's authority and came to represent all that is evil, represented as Satan.

In addition to the rejection and usurpation of God's authority, we see a distortion of the stewardship that God requires. The tenants sought to keep the fruit of the vineyard for themselves. Likewise, it is the bent of natural and self-centered people to think that they deserve to have all that is God's. Just as the owner demands his share of the fruit during the harvest, God requires that we recognize that we are also stewards of all that is His, and all of the material things we call our own, are ultimately His, and subject to his Lordship. Does God require that we return any part of that which we possess to Him? The concept of tithes and offerings simply serves to illustrate the true nature of stewardship. One who truly understands and submits to our call as stewards of God's grace naturally find themselves giving to God what is His. It is only those who reject the Master who withhold the fruit of the vineyard.

Leviticus 27:30-33. *And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD. ³¹And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. ³²And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD. ³³He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.*

Deuteronomy 26:13. *Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them.*

Malachi 3:9-12. *Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. ¹¹And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

¹²And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

Is our nation under a curse? All nations are under the curse of sin, as no nation has embraced the grace of God. Rather than honoring the creator, all nations impose secular or theocratic governments that persecute faith in God through Jesus Christ. God has both proclaimed and demonstrated His response to such apostate nations. The apostasy of man has never changed.

Luke 20:15-16. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? ¹⁶He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

It is interesting to note that as Jesus stated that the tenants murdered the son of the owner, the religious leaders were plotting the same in their hearts. What was done by the tenants closely parallels what the religious leaders ultimately did with Jesus. In only a few more days, the religious leaders would take Jesus from the vineyard of Gethsemane, cast Him outside of the walls of Jerusalem to the hill of Golgotha, and murder Him. Without allowing a response to the question of what the owner would do, Jesus' answer would serve to further infuriate the religious leaders. Jesus stated that the master would take the vineyard from the stewards and give the care of the vineyard to others. Likewise the covenant given to Israel through Abraham would be given to someone else. How do you suppose the religious leaders responded to this? Rather than listening to Jesus' message and repenting, they were only more infuriated as they would accuse Him of blasphemy and seek to destroy Him.

What was the people's response to the judgment? Their response could be translated, "God forbid," or "May this never be." Whether the people understood the application allegory to the Jerusalem leadership or not is unclear, but (1) since the parable speaks of something already taken place, and (2) His allegory is obvious prophecy, the response of the people seems to show their understanding of the prophecy. Most likely the people did not correlate the prophecy of the vineyard to Israel, but the religious leaders would have done so because of their intimacy with scripture and their knowledge of their own true feelings of rage. The religious leaders would understand the parable now, and the others would see the fulfillment of the prophecy in this parable just a few short days.

Jesus then continued to solidify His argument by applying it within the context of accepted scripture.

Luke 20:17-18. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become

the head of the corner? ¹⁸Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Up to this point Jesus was teaching the people without looking at the group of religious leaders who had come to expel him from the temple. However, at this point Jesus turns, and directs his attention directly to the religious leaders as he explains the application of the parable.

The stone spoken of here may refer to a cornerstone, that in their time was the most important part of the foundation, as from it all the measurements were taken as the foundation was built. The cornerstone might also refer to the capstone, or the keystone that when inserted at the top of the wall, keeps the entire wall intact. The weight of all of the stones is canted to lean on the capstone. In either use, it is clear that the prophecy Jesus is repeating,¹ that referred to the prophesied rejection of the Messiah, is tied to the rejection of the son by the tenants. Though this parable Jesus had identified himself as the Messiah.

There are two judgments stated here that result from the rejection of God's Son and His authority. First, the authority of Jesus, questioned now by the religious leaders, will be a stumbling block to all people. Acceptance or rejection of Christ would be the measure of salvation, and those who reject him will stumble at this point. A person who falls over a stone may break a bone or sustain some other injury. Throughout the history of Israel, we saw how the nation was continually hurt by their rejection of God's authority. However, broken bones can be healed. Even after rejecting Jesus we can repent and turn to Him and experience salvation.

The second judgment is final. People who reject Christ experience grief and loss in this life. Whoever persists in unbelief beyond the opportunities that grace gives in this lifetime will be crushed by God's final judgment. Ultimate judgment is more severe and lasting than stumbling over a stone. Final judgment is more like having the stone fall on the unbelievers. At Christ's second coming, Jesus' words will come with final judgment; an authority that will be crushing beyond any remedy.

Luke 20:19. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

Again, what was the response of the religious leaders? Rather than repent of their arrogance, they rejected his message and sought to kill him. True Christians need not fear either the stumbling block or the crushing judgment,

¹ Psalm 118:22.

since Jesus is the advocate and lawyer before the court of God's judgment. However, there is a nation and world around us that is doomed because of its rejection of God. Our American pledge of allegiance that still states, "One Nation, under God, ..." has become a hollow meaningless group of words, just as the Israelite's pledges lost their meaning.

As a Christian community, have we lost some of the meaning to our calling, and re-shaped it to fit our own requirements? Ultimately, we are accountable for what we have done with the Gospel in terms of our stewardship of all that comes with it. What are you doing with the gifts God has given to you, both in physical ability, and in worldly possessions?

What are you doing with the time God has given you? Let us not reshape the Gospel to fit our own desires, as was done by the religious leaders of Israel, and fall into the same trap, but rather recognize our accountability before God, and respond to Him joyfully, realizing the promise God has made to us. What does God promise us when we give back to Him liberally, what he has given to us? Let's look at the prophecy of Malachi. The deal that God has made with those who are faithful is a pretty good one.

Mal 3:10-12. *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. ¹¹And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. ¹²And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.*