

The Wicked Tenants

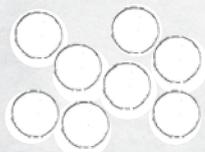
BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 21:33-45

MAIN POINT: God will judge those who reject Jesus.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

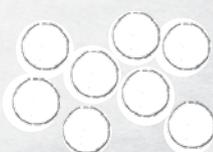
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

A couple of days after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the day after He cleansed the temple, Jesus returned to the temple complex and began teaching. The chief priests and elders questioned Jesus. "Who gave You this authority?" they asked. These religious leaders did not want to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. So Jesus told them parables to get them thinking and to teach them about Himself.

The parable of the wicked tenants illustrates the story of Israel's history. As you teach kids, help them connect the story to what happened in Israel's history. First, the landowner is God the Father. He chose to bless the world

through Abraham's family, the people of Israel. The vineyard is Israel.

The tenants are the leaders of Israel. Throughout history, God sent the Old Testament prophets to speak to God's people. But they did not listen to the prophets. Like the tenants of the vineyard, Israel's leaders persecuted the prophets. So God the Father sent His Son, Jesus. Jesus knew that the people were going to kill Him like the tenants killed the landowner's son.

Jesus led the leaders to conclude themselves what would be fair: that the landowner would punish the tenants and find workers who respect Him. God too is just. God will judge those who reject Jesus. He planned to choose a people who respect and trust Him—those who have faith—and form a community of believers from every nation to live under His righteous leadership.

Those who encounter Jesus can either accept and trust Him or walk away and reject Him. No one who meets Jesus will walk away unchanged. Pray that God would change the hearts of the kids you teach so that they would come to trust in Jesus, the Son of the loving and just Master, who wants everyone to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Doodle it:** As you tell the story, draw doodles to illustrate different parts of the story. Draw a large rectangle for the vineyard wall, stick figures for the servants, small circles for clusters of grapes, and a crowned stick figure for the landowner's son. Each time the tenants injure or kill one sent by the landowner, draw an X over that person's stick figure.

The Wicked Tenants

Matthew 21:33-45

Jesus was teaching in the temple. He told the religious leaders to listen to this story: “A landowner planted a vineyard. He built a wall around the vineyard and dug a pit for crushing grapes. He also built a tower. The landowner rented the vineyard to some tenants and left the country.

“When it was time for the harvest, the owner sent some servants to get his grapes. But the tenants grabbed the servants. They beat up one servant, killed another, and threw stones at a third.

“So the owner sent more servants to his vineyard, but the tenants attacked them, too.

“Finally, the owner sent his son. He expected the tenants to respect him. But the tenants threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him.”

Jesus asked, “When the owner comes back to the vineyard, what do you think he should do to those tenants?”

The religious leaders answered, “They deserve to die! The owner should rent the vineyard to people who respect him.”

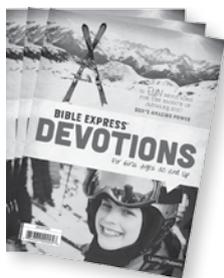
Jesus replied, “Don’t you know what the Scriptures say?

“The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the cornerstone—the most important stone of all. God did this, and it is amazing to us.”

Then Jesus said, “So I tell you, God’s kingdom will be taken away from you and given to people who do what He commands. Anyone who trips over this stone will be broken to pieces, and this stone will crush anyone it falls on.”

When the religious leaders heard Jesus' story, they knew that Jesus was talking about them.

Christ Connection: Jesus told this story to teach the religious leaders about Himself. God sent His own Son, Jesus, to earth but the religious leaders rejected Him. Jesus is the cornerstone—the most important One of all. Only He can save us from our sin.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover that the Pharisees said the vineyard owner should find faithful servants. Jesus' parable hints that God would raise up followers from all nations, united by the gospel. (Acts 1:8) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The Wicked Tenants

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 21:33-45

MAIN POINT: God will judge those who reject Jesus.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, invite them to share about a situation that didn't seem fair. Ask kids to describe what is fair. How do they decide what is fair or unfair?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Accept and Reject" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Accept and Reject" on the activity page. Kids should unscramble the names of books of the Bible. Kids should fill in the numbered boxes to decode the Bible story main point. Provide Bibles to help kids.

SAY • Today we will hear a parable that teaches us that **God will judge those who reject Jesus.**

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Tower game

Use the rectangular wooden blocks to create a tower. Position three blocks side-by-side horizontally to form the first story. Then add three perpendicular blocks side-by-side to create the second story. Alternate the direction of the blocks for each story until the tower is 18 stories tall. Invite



LOW PREP

- rectangular wooden blocks, 54

kids to play a construction game. Explain the rules:

1. On a player's turn, he will remove any block from the tower below the top story. The player must then add the block to the top of the tower.
2. Players may only touch the tower with one hand at a time. A player's turn ends when 10 seconds have passed or the next player touches the tower, whichever happens first.
3. The game ends when the tower falls.

SAY • How did you decide which blocks to move? What made you decide if a block could not be moved? In today's Bible story, Jesus talked about Himself as the cornerstone. In a building, the cornerstone is the most important stone. We'll find out more soon.

OPTION 2: Rejected

Form two teams of kids. Give each team a piece of paper and a pencil. Assign one player in each group to write.

Call for kids to shout out something they really like.

Write one of the responses on the board. Then give groups 30 seconds to list why someone might reject that item.

Example: chocolate ice cream (1. doesn't like chocolate; 2. is lactose intolerant; 3. sensitive to cold; 4. prefers vanilla)

Call for groups to share their responses. Award one point for each unique answer. Play several rounds, allowing kids to name different places, activities, or things.

SAY • Today we are going to hear a story Jesus about people who reject Him. If Jesus is God's Son, why would anyone reject Him? Let's find out.

- chalkboard or dryerase board
- chalk or markers
- paper
- pencils
- watch or timer (optional)

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire
• backpack
• Bible

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a backpack. Leader holds a Bible.]

LEADER • Welcome back to my campsite. Gather around, everyone. Can you all hear me? Great. Well, I wanted to thank you all for joining me these last few weeks. Nothing is quite like the great outdoors. But sometimes great things come to an end. After today, I'm packing up my campsite and going home. I've really enjoyed learning from God's Word with you, and I can't wait for you to hear one more parable. *[Hold up your Bible.]*

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • God's plan all along was to send His Son to rescue people from sin. Jesus, God's Son, came to earth as a baby. When He grew up, He spent three years traveling and teaching people about God and

His kingdom. Remember, Jesus sometimes told stories when He taught. Now that is an interesting strategy. Let's review our big picture question and answer: ***Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Let's review the parables we have heard so far.

Jesus told a parable about how people respond to the gospel. Does anyone remember what that parable was called? (*the parable of the sower*) Jesus taught that **not everyone who hears the gospel believes it.**

Then the parable of the unmerciful servant taught us that **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.** Jesus also told the parable of the good Samaritan because **Jesus calls us to love others as He has loved us.**

We learned through the three parables in Luke 15 that **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.** Can anyone tell me why Jesus told the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector? (**God rejects the proud but gives grace to the humble.**)

Today's Bible story is called "The Wicked Tenants." A *tenant* is someone who lives on another person's property, like a renter. This story is found in the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Now, even though Jesus told a story about some people who worked on a farm, you know that—like all of Jesus' parables—the story is actually about much more. Let's find out why Jesus told this parable.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

- Bibles
- “The Wicked Tenants” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 21:33-45. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The Wicked Tenants.”

LEADER • Jesus told a parable about a landowner who rented his vineyard to some tenants. Now we know Jesus wasn’t just telling a story about some unruly renters. ***Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.*** Let’s take a closer look at what this parable teaches us about God and His kingdom.

Jesus told this story to some religious leaders in the temple. They wondered how Jesus had the authority to teach the things He taught. They didn’t want to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus used parables to teach them about Himself.

This parable is a story that teaches us about the people of Israel. The landowner is like God the Father. He chose to bless the world through Abraham’s family, the Israelites. The vineyard is Israel, and the tenants are the leaders of Israel.

God sent prophets to speak to the Israelites, but they did not listen. They mistreated the prophets. Then God sent His Son. Maybe the people would respect Him. But the people rejected Him too.

Christ connection

LEADER • Jesus taught the religious leaders that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**, and He is fair to do so. Jesus is the cornerstone—the most important One of all. Only He can save us from our sin, and rejecting Him is a big mistake.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Jesus knew the religious leaders would kill Him like the tenants in the story killed the landowner's son. But by dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus would be the Savior of the world.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

LEADER • When Jesus came to earth, He taught the people many things. Did you know that many people believe that Jesus was a good teacher, but they do not believe He is the Messiah? Jesus is more than a good teacher; He is the Messiah! He *is* the Son of God sent to earth to be the Savior of the world!

Lead boys and girls in singing “He Saw a Huge Crowd.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “He Saw a Huge Crowd” song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • The religious leaders were foolish to reject Jesus. Jesus told them this parable to teach them that **God will judge those who reject Jesus**. They needed a Savior, so rejecting the Messiah didn't make any sense! Watch this.

Show the “Unit 22, Session 6” discussion starter video.

Then guide kids to discuss the following questions:

- Why would someone in need reject someone who can help?
- Why do some people reject Jesus?
- What are some ways people try to be right with God apart from Jesus?
- In what ways do we reject Jesus or try to be right on our own?

LEADER • Jesus is God the Son. He came to earth to be

- “Unit 22, Session 6” discussion starter video

the Savior of the world. We are sinners who need a Savior, and we can choose to accept Jesus or reject Him. God is fair to judge those who reject Jesus. We can trust in Jesus and tell others about Him so they might trust in Him too.

• “The Kingdom of Heaven” song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • I’m so glad God gave us His Word so we can learn about Him and His kingdom. Let’s sing our unit theme song.

Sing together “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • God, thank You for Your Word. You are good, and You love us. Long ago, You sent prophets to tell us about Your plan to save sinners. And then, You sent Your Son. Forgive us for resisting Jesus. He is not a threat nor an enemy; He is our Friend. Change our hearts to welcome Him with joy. We need You and love You. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- paper
- pencils

Guide kids to sit around a table. Give each kid a pencil. Provide a piece of paper to one kid. Instruct him to say the first word of Mark 6:34 aloud and write the word on the paper. He should then pass the paper to the kid on his right.

The next kid will read the written word, say the second word, and then write the second word next to the first. Then she will pass the paper to the player on her right.

Each subsequent player should read the words already written before adding the next word. Continue passing the paper around the table until kids complete the key passage.

SAY • When Jesus came to earth to teach, many people were excited to see Him. They came to Jesus to learn about God and His kingdom, and Jesus had compassion on them. But not everyone was glad to see Jesus. In today's Bible story, we learned that **God will judge those who reject Jesus.**

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Invite a volunteer to sit in a chair at the front of the room. Point out that the volunteer is competing against the rest of the kids. Explain that you will ask a review question. Kids

who think they know the answer should raise their hands. The volunteer should choose someone with a hand raised to answer. Then the volunteer should state whether or not she thinks the player's answer is correct.

If the volunteer thinks the player is correct and he is, the volunteer earns one point. If he is not correct, the rest of the kids earn a point.

If the volunteer thinks the player is incorrect and he is, the volunteer earns one point. If the player's answer is correct, the rest of the kids earn a point. Announce the answer and award points appropriately.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

1. In what section of the Bible can we find this parable? (*the Gospels, the New Testament*)
2. To whom did Jesus tell this parable? (*the religious leaders in the temple, Matt. 21:23*)
3. Name one of the three things the landowner created in the vineyard. (*a wall, a pit, a tower; Matt. 21:33*)
4. What fruit was grown in the vineyard? (*grapes, Matt. 21:34*)
5. How did the tenants treat the landowner's servants? (*They attacked them, Matt. 21:35-36*)
6. How did the landowner think the tenants would treat his son? (*He thought they would respect his son, Matt. 21:37*)
7. What did the tenants do to the landowner's son? (*They killed him, Matt. 21:39*)
8. What did the religious leaders think should happen to the tenants? (*They thought they deserved to die, Matt. 21:41*)
9. ***Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.***

SAY • Great job, everyone. Jesus told this story about the

vineyard and the tenants to teach the religious leaders about Himself. The vineyard is like God's kingdom, and the tenants are like the leaders of Israel.

Like the landowner had sent his servants, God sent His prophets. But the people rejected the prophets. So God sent His Son. Do you think the people respected Him? No. The religious leaders rejected Jesus. **God will reject those who reject Jesus.**



LOW PREP

- rectangular blocks or cardboard shoe boxes

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

- map
- index cards
- pencils

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Cornerstone demonstration

Provide rectangular blocks or shoe boxes and guide kids to arrange them to form two walls that meet at a corner.

Point out the box at the bottom of the corner. Explain that it is called the cornerstone. Remove the box and point out how the wall falls. Step on the box to crumple it, and then challenge kids to rebuild the walls. Show how the wall tilts without a strong cornerstone.

SAY • Jesus talked about Himself as the cornerstone. Like the cornerstone of a building, Jesus is the most important One of all. To reject Him would be a big mistake! **God will reject those who reject Jesus.**

OPTION 2: Pray for Christians in Indonesia

Display a map of the world. Point out the location of Indonesia in Southeast Asia. Provide index cards for kids to take notes as you share facts about the country. Suggest kids draw an outline of Indonesia on one side of the card.

- Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population.
- Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands.
- Some Muslims in Indonesia have declared war

against Christians living there.

- Less than 9 percent of the population is Christian.
- Pray for new believers who are pressured to give up their faith.

SAY • Men and women risk their lives to tell others about Jesus. We know that **God will reject those who reject Jesus**. And if people reject Jesus, they will reject His followers. Let's pray for missionaries who face persecution for their faith around the world. Pray that those fighting against believers would come to know and love Jesus too.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Encourage kids to write a response to these questions: Do you feel any hesitation to trust in Jesus? Why or why not? What do you know to be true about Jesus that makes you want to trust or reject Him?

SAY • Jesus has authority as the Son of God. He deserves respect and worship. **God will reject those who reject Jesus**, and He will accept those who trust in Jesus.

Lead kids in prayer. Pray that kids would not only trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior but that they would tell others about Him. Pray that kids would honor and love Jesus, the one and only Son of God.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Parable People" on the activity page. Direct kids to match each group or person from Israel's history to the people in the parable of the wicked tenants. (*Answers: vineyard, people of Israel; son, Jesus; tenants, Israel's leaders*)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Parable People" activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.