

The Attackers: Fault for National Decline Originates in the Pulpit, Jer 12:10–13a; Figurative Use of Vineyard in the Parable of the Landowner, Matt 21:33–46; the Stone the Builders Rejected, Ps 118:22-23; Rev 1:8a

Jeremiah 12:10 - Many shepherds [priests, prophets, and, later, pastors] have ruined My vineyard, they have trampled down My field; they have made My pleasant field a desolate wilderness.

v. 11 - "It has been made a desolation, desolate, it mourns before Me; the whole land has been made desolate, because no man lays it to heart.

v. 12 - "On all the bare heights in the wilderness destroyers have come, for a sword of the Lord is devouring from one end of the land even to the other; there is no peace for anyone.

v. 13a - "They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have strained themselves to no profit."

1. Political leaders absent virtue make decisions based on cosmic thought rather than divine guidance. Zedekiah was king of Judah at the time Jeremiah wrote his prophecy. The king made the same mistake as did Hezekiah who preceded him – he went down to Egypt for help.
2. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah's and it is in his account of the reign of Zedekiah that we learn of the covenant the king entered into with Nebuchadnezzar and which he broke when he appealed for help from Pharaoh's army. (Ezekiel 17:11–21)
3. Jeremiah's indictment of pastors for the problem of national reversionism attracts our attention since this very same problem plagues the souls of those who are citizens of Client Nation America.
4. In Jeremiah 12:10 the prophet indicts the prophets and the priests with charges of having: (1) ruined My vineyard, (2) trampled down My field, and (3) made My field a desolate wilderness:

Jeremiah 12:10 - Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard, they have trampled down My field; they have made My pleasant field a desolate wilderness.

5. The word *ruined* is **חָחַץ** (*shachath*) and in context it refers to the future overthrow of Judah by a predator nation. The prophets and priests did not participate in the literal destruction of the nation
6. However, their false prophecies and false teachings led to the moral and spiritual decline of the people whose inversion of thought led to the Lord lifting the wall of fire and permitting Nebuchadnezzar to invade and conquer His vineyard.
7. *Vineyard* is the noun **כֶּרֶם** (*kerem*) and its literal and figurative uses in Scripture are very instructive:

Vineyard. The preparation of a vineyard is the most costly and onerous of all the operations of that primitive husbandry in Eastern lands. It is, in fact, the only branch of agriculture, as there practiced, which demands any considerable outlay. In the first place, the vineyard must be carefully inclosed by a permanent fence, which is required for no other crop. The pasture lands outside the villages are all unfenced, and the boundaries only marked by well-known stones or landmarks. (pp. 1157–58)

Figurative. The vine is a symbol of the nation Israel. The vine is used as a figure of Israel's chastisement for her sin (Isa. 5:7; 27:1; Jer.12:10); while the failure of the vineyard is a symbol of severe calamities (Isa. 32:10); to plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof is a figure of peaceful prosperity (Neh. 9:25; Isa. 65:21; Ezek. 28:26).¹ (p. 1158)

8. In Matthew 21:33–46, we find the Parable of the Landowner where God is depicted as planting a vineyard complete with a protective surrounding wall and a winepress. He then rented it out to vine-growers (tenant farmers).

Matthew 21:33 - "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, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey." (NASB)

9. The Landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel, and the vine-growers are the nation's leaders.
10. God invests a great deal of His time and energy in getting the Jews into the Promised Land where they enjoy the protection of the Wall of Fire. The winepress is emblematic of the Landowner's anticipation of a great harvest; the tower an indicator of divine reconnaissance.
11. When harvest time arrives, God sends in His prophets called "servants" in verse 34. They are the prophets who foretell events that effect Israel as a nation, including those regarding their Messiah, and which are designed to lead the people into an understanding of God's future plans for the nation.
12. Israeli leadership rejects these men by battering, killing, and stoning them (v. 35). God counters by sending in a larger number of prophets who are likewise so treated (v. 36).
13. Believing that the people and the leadership will allow His Son to perform the harvest, God sends in Messiah (v. 37)
14. Again, the people and the leadership assault the Messiah and conspire to kill Him (v. 38). They seize Him, take Him outside the vineyard, and execute Him.
15. Jesus was taken out beyond the walls of Jerusalem and crucified on Calvary by the Romans at the behest of the Jewish hierarchy (v. 39)
16. What the Landowner does about this is not specifically addressed, but those to whom the Lord is speaking are the chief priests and elders who challenged His authority to teach in the temple. They contend that the vine-growers – the leadership of Israel which includes them – should be fired and more honorable stewards hired to replace them (v. 41).
17. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22–23 where He is described as the Stone which the builders rejected. This is the most important stone in the construction of a building. It may be interpreted as the "cornerstone" or the "capstone." Either way these are the most important items in a building. Jesus is either the foundational stone at the corner or the final stone at its summit – the first and the last:

"Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠμέγα.": "I am the Alpha and the Omega." (Revelation 1:8a)

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 1157–58.

18. The Lord sums up the condemnation of the chief priests and Pharisees when he concludes that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to people who will produce fruit.
19. The kingdom of God may be enjoyed by anyone who believes in Jesus as the Christ for salvation and eternal life, both Jew and Gentile alike.
20. The chief priests, elders, Pharisees, and the Jewish political establishment were all categorized as vine-growers who had failed to bring in the harvest in first-century Israel; likewise, for the leaders of Israel that Jeremiah mentions in Jeremiah 12:10.

47. Application: The catalysts for the historical downtrends and cycles of discipline suffered by client nations of the Church Age are the pastors who fail to communicate the doctrines of Scripture to that portion of God's flock assigned to them.
48. The failure of pastors to communicate doctrine with accuracy and clarity results in the loss of peace in the people's souls and subsequent loss of peace and tranquility within the community, state, and nation.
49. The solution is to return to the establishment principles that created the culture's original order, however, a rebellious people have ears to hear but do not listen: