

# By What Authority Are You Doing These Things?

**Matthew 21:19b-43; Mark 11:20 to 12:12; Luke 20:1-19**  
Tuesday the twelfth of Nisan

**DIG:** How did Yeshua use the withered fig tree as a teachable moment for the twelve apostles? What details of prayer did the Master give His talmidim? Why did the leaders of pharisaic Judaism challenge Christ's authority to teach? How did they view His theological training? In reality, what training had Jesus actually received? From Whom? Why did the Lord bring up **John the Baptist**? Why was that a problem for the religious leaders? What was the Meshiach trying to say in the story of **the two sons**? What is the one main point in the parable of the rebellious tenants?

**REFLECT:** Our spiritual actions speak louder than our words. How does YHVH look at you today? Are you a tenant of the LORD's **vineyard**? Do you have Yeshua as **the cornerstone** of your personal faith in ADONAI? Are you producing the kind of fruit that is pleasing to the landowner, our Father in heaven? Have you been **wearing the wedding clothes** of salvation that He offers to all?

The cleansing of the Temple challenged the Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) who had certainly authorized the money changing and the sale of sacrificial animals. So what right did the **maverick Rabbi** have to challenge their decree? **Jesus** was either superior to the Sanhedrin or **He** was a rebel who would be sentenced to death. As a result, Tuesday was the main day of examination and led to a confrontation in the Court of the Gentiles.

**Singing at the Temple:** From the Talmud Tractate *tamid* we know exactly which Psalm would have been sung on which day of the week in connection with the daily burnt offering in the Temple. It is surprising how closely each of the Psalms coincides with the singing of these daily readings. It was on this day, of all days, that the Levitical choir sang Psalm 82 in the Temple on the occasion of the daily burnt offering. In this Psalm the judges of Isra'el were called to put an end to their injustice, since they themselves would otherwise fall under divine judgment. The Levitical choir, with instrumental accompaniment from the Temple orchestra (see Nb2 - **Levitical Musicians at the Nicanor Gate**), sang:

Elohim stands in the divine assembly; there with the judges, He judges. "How long will you go on judging unfairly, favoring the wicked? Give justice to the weak and fatherless! Uphold the rights of the wretched and poor! Uphold the rights of the

wretched and poor! Rescue the destitute and needy; deliver them from the power of the wicked!" They don't know, they don't understand, they wander about in darkness; meanwhile, all the foundations of the earth are being undermined. This is My decree, "You are judges, sons of the Most High all of you. Nevertheless, you will die like mortals; like any prince, you will fall." Rise up, Elohim, and judge the earth; for all the nations are Yours (Psalm 82:1-8 CJB).<sup>1273</sup>

On Monday, Jesus cursed a fig tree that had no buds on it and used His action as a teachable moment for His talmidim. It was a perfect symbol of Isra'el, full of promise but producing nothing (see [Iu - Jesus Curses a Fig Tree](#)). Now as they went along on Tuesday morning the twelfth of Nisan the apostles saw the fig tree withered from the roots and they were amazed. Peter remembered what had happened the previous day and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered! How did the fig tree wither so quickly (Mattityahu 21:20; Mark 11:20)?

Christ used the incident not only as a prophetic picture of national Isra'el but also as a lesson in personal faith. He replied: Yes! I tell you that whoever does not doubt in his heart but trusts that what God says will happen can say to this mountain, "Go and throw yourself into the sea!" and it will be done (Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:22-23 CJB). A mountain in the Scriptures represents a kingdom or an empire. This was a powerful visual lesson as they stood on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Dead Sea to the west. Anything is possible with ADONAI in the picture.

Yeshua affirms the omnipotence of the LORD and the power of prayer when He promised: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Don't reduce this grand statement to the category of new cars and paychecks. Don't limit the promise of this passage to the selfish pool of perks and favors. The fruit ADONAI assures is far greater than earthly wealth. His dreams are much greater than promotions and proposals.

Jesus wants you to fly. He wants you to fly free of yesterday's guilt. He wants you to fly free of today's fears. He wants you to fly free of tomorrow's grave. Sin, fear, death. These are the mountains He has moved. These are the prayers He will answer. That is the fruit He will grant. This is what He longs to do.<sup>1274</sup>

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins (Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:24-25). This is a tremendous promise and truth but it must also be tempered with what God

says about the details of **prayer**. ADONAI cannot sin and will not endorse any activity that breaks the laws of His moral universe (**James 1:12-16**). But on the other hand, we are told by YHVH that we will receive such answers to prayer when we ask for things according to His will and not necessarily based on our own desires (**First John 5:14-15**).

Therefore, **Christ** was clearly giving a practical picture of first-century **Isra'el** as well as a teaching on the power of **prayer**. For the record, there is no mention of **the Twelve** or **Jesus Himself** ever moving a literal **mountain**. There are similar expressions used in the Talmudic literature to teach similar truths. The **rooting up of mountains** is a phrase used to describe something impossible (**Tractate Sanhedrin 24a** and also **Mattityahu 17:20**). Consequently, we must see **Yeshua's** statement as a common form of rabbinic hyperbole to express an important point.

There are many mountainous challenges that face all of us at different times, yet with ADONAI's presence in our lives, there is power for change and victory. **The apostles** took careful note of the implications. We, too, can see amazing answers to our **prayers** when **they** are aligned with the will of **God** through **Jesus Christ**.<sup>1275</sup>

After this teaching, **Jesus** walked straight to **the Temple**. It had been three years since **He** had turned over the tables of the moneychangers (see **Bs - Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover**), and **He** did it again the previous day (see **Iv - Jesus Entered the Temple Area and Drove Out All Who Were Buying and Selling**). Only this time **the Meshiach** didn't need a **whip** fashioned out of **cords**, and **He** is no longer an unknown rabbi.

While many in **Isra'el** welcomed **Jesus** during **His** entrance into **Yerushalayim**, it is clear that many were still not convinced. The controversy continued to build as some of the religious leaders in **the City of David** continued to question **the Messiah** in the second stage of interrogation. In their system, teaching required previous rabbinic authorization. **Jesus** had no formal rabbinic training; however, **God** taught **Him** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ir - Because the Sovereign LORD Helps Me, I Will Set My Face Like a Flint**).

It was a day of confrontation and heated discussion. After the dramatic cleansing of **the Temple** the previous day it was not surprising that the religious leaders confronted **the troublemaking Rabbi** again. **They** arrived again in **Jerusalem** and for the moment **Christ** ignored the moneychangers and the men selling doves. **Jesus** entered **the Temple courts** and selected a spot under the shaded awnings of Solomon's Colonnade (see **Nd - Solomon's Colonnade**) and begins to teach. But while **Jesus** was teaching the people and proclaiming **the Good News**, the foremost teachers of the **Great Sanhedrin**, immediately interrupted

Him and asked: **Tell us by what authority you are doing these things?** This did not happen by accident. **Their** united plan was probably agreed upon during the previous night.

The interrogators who stood before **the Rabbi from Nazareth** were not merely common **pharisaic leaders**, but the judges of **Isra'el**, the leading religious minds in **the nation**. **Their** goal was to use **their** intellectual skill to make **Jesus** appear foolish. **Another** asked: **Who gave you the authority to do this (Mattityahu 21:23; Mark 11:27-28; Luke 20:1-2)?**

It has long been a common practice within Judaism that one must have some kind of rabbinic ordination to establish one's religious **authority**. It was never enough to merely quote one's own views. A qualified teacher would need to substantiate his opinion with reference to other scholars who hold such a view as well. The Hebrew word for **authority** means *to connect or draw close*; therefore, the ordination ceremony of kings, priests and rabbis was symbolized by the laying on of hands, connecting other leaders by affirming the call to duty of the newly ordained. These questions by the religious leaders implied that **Yeshua** was unqualified to teach because **He** taught in a manner different than all the other rabbis. It was, however, not only the content of **His** teaching, but also **His** manner of speaking with **authority** on theological issues that would normally need the affirmation of other rabbis that infuriated **them (Matthew 7:28-29)**.<sup>1276</sup> You would have thought that by this time anyone witnessing **Messiah's** miracles would have been convinced of **His** messiahship, but unbelief never has enough proof.

**Yeshua's** response comes, again in classic Jewish form, by answering their question with a question of **His** own. If **they** answered **His** question sincerely, **He** would be more than happy to reciprocate. **Jesus** took them back to the ministry of **John the Immerser** and **his** baptism of repentance. **He** replied: **I will also ask you a question**. **The religious leaders** had probably spoken with **the Pharisees** who had traveled to Galilee the previous year and **they** considered **Jesus** merely clever. But **they** think **the Nazarene** uneducated, unread and hope to lure **Him** into a theological trap.

**Answer Me, said Jesus, and I will tell you by what authority I AM doing these things. John's baptism - was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell Me (Matt 21:24-25; Mark 11:29-30; Luke 20:3-4)!** These were the supposed experts on the Torah, the best educated in the entire nation of **Isra'el**. Surely **they** would have no trouble answering **Him**. In modern terminology, **He** put **them** on the spot. Now **they** were stuck! **They** began discussing it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' **He** will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet" (Matthew 21:26; Mark 11:31-

32; Luke 20:5-6). Check mate. **Jesus** remained silent. **The religious big-shots** hadn't given **Him** an answer yet and **the crowd** knew it. It was becoming clear that **they** were no different from **the Pharisees** who unsuccessfully tried to trap **Messiah** in Galilee. Once again **they** are on the defensive. **Their** trap failed miserably.<sup>1277</sup>

After pondering the consequences, **the phony Pharisees** answered **Yeshua** by simply professing ignorance to save face: **We don't know where it was from**. In response, **Jesus** said: **Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things** (Matthew 21:27; Mark 11:33; Luke 20:7-8). Since **they** were unwilling to take a stand one way or another, **Yeshua** responded that **He** didn't need to tell **them** the answer to **their** question either.

One would think the unresolved question about **Christ's** rabbinic **authority** would have ended the confrontation with **the Temple** leadership. But **Jesus** continued to challenge **the** members of the Sanhedrin by telling two **parables** that gave an insight into spiritual truth. **Then He** began to speak to **them** in parables, saying: **What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard."** **"I will not," he answered, but later, to his credit, he changed his mind and went.** There is a clear spiritual allusion here. The phrase **later changed his mind** is the same as the common word for repentance (Hebrew: *shuwb*). **Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but his words did not match up to his actions and he did not go into the vineyard. Which of the two did what his father wanted?"** **"The first," they answered** (Mattityahu 21:28-31a). It was clear to **the chief priests, Torah-teachers and elders** that **the first son** was the one who pleased **his father**. Although **he** had started reluctantly, **he** ultimately responded with obedience. **Jesus** affirmed that **their** answer was correct, but **He** surprised **them** with a direct application to **His** previous question about **John the Baptizer**.

**The Jewish leadership**, hostile towards **the Galilean Rabbi**, was like **the second son** who said: **I will, but** thought "No." Many **Israelites** who had lived in the mire of **sin** repented during this period. **They** were like **the first son** who said, "No," but afterwards thought, "Yes." **Yeshua** said to **them**: **Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For Yochanan the Forerunner came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did** (Matthew 21:31b-32a).

The door of repentance is always open, but **Christ** had a somber warning for the religious leaders. **They** were in danger of judgment because **even after they saw** the mercy of **Ha'Shem** they **did not repent and believe John's** testimony that **Yeshua** was **the Messiah**

(Matthew 21:32b). Sinners would enter **the kingdom of God**, while the apostate religious leaders will not. Obedience will reveal those who are heirs to **the Kingdom** (First Samuel 15:22). The gates of repentance are always open, yet **God** is the final **Gatekeeper**. So according to this **parable**, it is not so much where we start, but how we finish.<sup>1278</sup>

**The crowd** was in awe and **the religious rulers** were stunned into silence.

Without even letting **the apostate leaders** pause to catch their spiritual breath, **Yeshua** told another **parable** with **authority**, saying: **Now listen to the parable of the rebellious tenants. There was a farmer who planted a vineyard.** The Jewish leadership knew that **the vineyard** represented **Isra'el** from **Isaiah 5:7** where the owner of **the vineyard** was **God the Father**, **the vineyard** is **Isra'el**, and **the tenants** were the **Pharisees**.

Here, **the farmer put a wall around the vineyard, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower.** **The wall and the tower** were important for protection, **and the winepress** for harvesting the crop. **Then he rented it to tenants**, delegating the responsibilities of **his vineyard** to them, **and then went away on a long journey.** **When the harvest-time came, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the crop.** This would normally be a simple transaction as part of the agreement between **the landowner** and the tenant. **But**, in a major twist in the story, **the tenants** rebelled and **seized his servants - this one they beat up, that one they killed, another they stoned** (**Matthew 21:33-35 CJB; Mark 12:1-3 CJB; Luke 20:9-10 CJB**). The first **servants** represent the prophets in the pre-exile period (**Second Chronicles 36:14-16**).

It's not like this kind of dispute had never been heard of before. **The Talmud addresses a similar case where some tenants could actually claim ownership of a property if they could prove their undisputed possession of it for three years** (**Tractate Bava Batra 3:1**). In this parable it is obvious that **the tenants** were attempting to take **the vineyard** away from **the farmer** and **his servants**.

**Then the farmer sent other servants to them, more than the first group, and they killed them - some they beat up, others they killed** (**Mattityahu 21:36 CJB; Mark 12:4 CJB; Luke 20:11 CJB**). The second **servant** represents the prophets in the post-exile period. They treated the second group of **servants** as **shamefully** as the first.

**Yet the farmer sent [another]; this one they [also killed]** (**Luke 20:12 CJB**). The third **servant** represents **John the Baptist**.

The Jewish leadership had **killed** the prophets, now **they** would **kill the Son**. **He still had one person left, a son whom he loved; finally,** taking extreme measures, **the farmer sent him to them, saying, "I will send My beloved son, surely they will feel shame before (Greek: *entrapesontai*) him"** (Matthew 21:37; Mark 12:5-6; Luke 20:13). The hope was not that **the tenants** might treat **his son** kindly, but rather in **his** presence **they** might feel **ashamed** of what **they** had done and give up **their** rebellious acts. Any other result was inconceivable **to him**. All of which goes to show the depth of human depravity and what lengths it will go to hold on to its sin. In using the words **a son whom he loved**, our Lord may have had in mind the words of **the Father** at His baptism: **You are My Son, whom I love; with You I AM well pleased** (Mark 1:11b).

**But when the shameless tenants saw the son, they said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him** (Mattityahu 21:38-39 CJB; Mark 12:7-8 CJB; Luke 20:15a CJB). Apparently the murderous group was still conscious of the Torah in the midst of **their** crime, **as they remembered the commandment not to desecrate the land with death**. So they attacked **the son** outside of the borders of the property - **and then they killed him** (Tractate Oholot 2.1)!<sup>1279</sup>

Building to the climax of the parable, **Jesus** asked the penetrating question: **Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?** They answered Him, and said that the farmer would destroy those tenants and rent out the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop when its due. When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid" (Matthew 21:40-41 CJB; Mark 12:9 CJB; Luke 20:15-16 CJB)! Their answer was self-incriminating because it revealed their own spiritual blindness.

**Isra'el** and **her spiritual leaders** were called to be **God's** special **vineyard** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ba - The Song of the Vineyard**). In the commonly known **Isaiah** parable, **ADONAI** is said to have checked on **His vineyard (Isra'el)** expecting a **good crop of grapes** (like justice), but it yielded only **bad fruit** (like bloodshed and distress). But **Yeshua's** parable added a new wrinkle. The original **tenants** were either **beat up, killed, or stoned**, and **the vineyard** subsequently rented out to other **tenants**. As **the evil tenants** considered the meaning of **His** conclusion, **Jesus** emphasized that the rejection by **the** original **tenants** should have had a familiar ring **to them**.

**Yeshua looked directly at the chief priests, the Torah-teachers, together with the elders and said to them, "Have you never read in the TaNaKh: The very rock which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This has come from ADONAI, and in our eyes it is amazing (Psalm 118:22-23 CJB; Matthew 21:42 CJB; Mark 12:10-11 CJB; Luke 20:17 CJB; Acts 4:11; First Peter 2:4 and 7).** Once again, as in the earlier part of this chapter, the quote was from the Hallel chanted at the major festivals. This had national and individual application for Isra'el. In particular, **Yeshua focuses on the apostate religious leaders (the builders of Judaism) who ironically rejected the very cornerstone of their faith (Yeshua as King Messiah).** One can only imagine the ridiculous thought of the Holy Temple trying to stand without **the very cornerstone** of the foundation. No way Moshe!

**Whoever falls on that stone, Yeshua, will be broken to pieces, his** pride will be done away with, and in **his** humiliation **he** may recognize **his** sin and need for forgiveness, so that **he** repents. **But if he** persists in **his** own way, apart from **God**, and **the stone falls on him, he will be crushed to powder,** totally destroyed (**Mattityahu 21:44 CJB; Luke 20:18 CJB**).<sup>1280</sup> **The Messiah** will be a point of contention between **the Jews** who believe and those who do not. That specific Jewish generation was **crushed** in 70 AD.

**Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God** (the vineyard) **will be taken away from you** (the current leaders) **and given to the kind of people that will produce good fruit (Matthew 21:43 CJB).** Covenant, or Replacement Theology, teaches that **God** took **the Kingdom** away from the Jews and gave it to the Gentile Church. Obviously, that is not what is taught here by the Scriptures. There are too many verses affirming that while **Isra'el** may be largely in unbelief regarding **Messiah**, **His** Covenant promises are secure (**Jeremiah 21:31-36; Romans 11:1-5, 25-29**). Rather, **He** is warning that Jewish leaders who do not look out for **God's** interests will be deprived of sharing in **His** rulership; and this task, with its rewards, will fall to a different Jewish generation at the end of the Great Tribulation (see my commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**).<sup>1281</sup> Therefore, the message is not replacing **Isra'el** here, but a postponement of the fulfillment until all **Isra'el** is saved (**Romans 11:26**) and ready to receive the true **King Messiah**. **The one main point of the parable of the rebellious tenants is that the Kingdom was being taken away from that specific Jewish generation, but it would be given back at a future time when all Isra'el demonstrates true repentance.**