

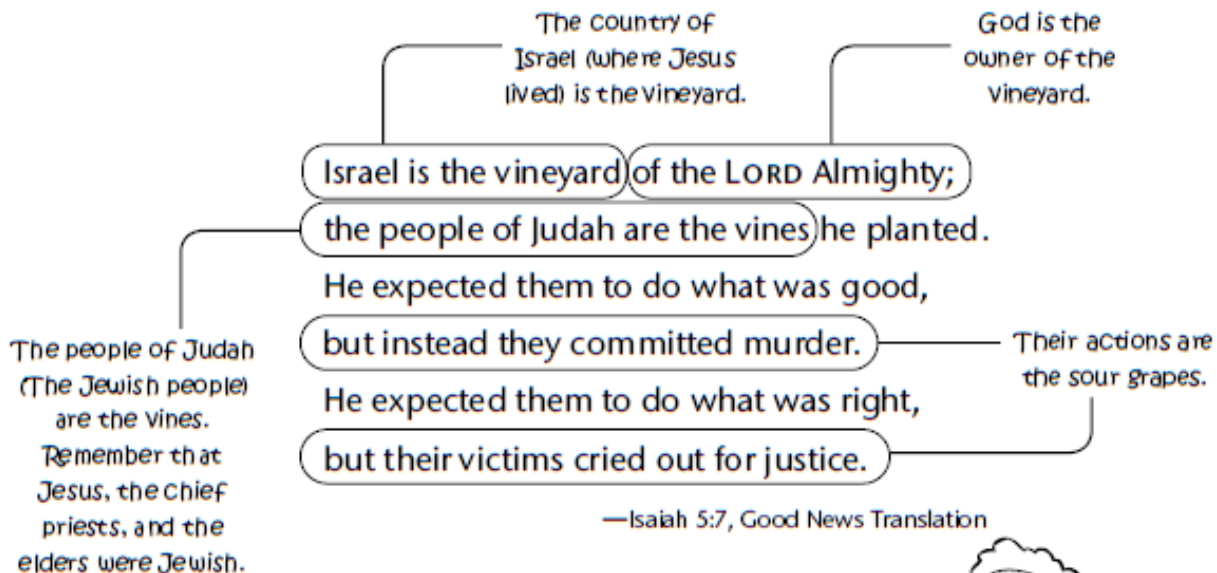
Decoding the Story



When Jesus told the story recorded in Matthew 21:33–39, he used images his listeners knew so they would understand his teaching. Let's look a little closer at some of these images so we can understand Jesus' story better too.

To do this we need to turn back to the Old Testament. These are the writings and faith stories that Jesus, the chief priests, and the elders would have read and known well. Isaiah 5:1–6 tells the story of a landowner who planted a vineyard and worked really hard to care for the grapevines. When he harvested the grapes, however, the fruit wasn't any good.

What did Isaiah's story mean? Let's look at Isaiah 5:7. In this passage the prophet explains the story.



One more thing:
In Bible times, prophets were people who delivered God's messages. The prophets also were known as God's servants or God's slaves.



Faith Stories

Elisa and Maria

Elisa and Maria live on the same street and have been good friends since kindergarten. They belong to different churches, but have visited each other's Sunday school classes. Lately, Elisa has been talking about how she believes God wants her to tell the people in her congregation to open a food pantry for the people in their neighborhood who can't afford to buy enough groceries. Maria is afraid Elisa is setting herself up for a fall because the adults in Elisa's congregation will say "no."

Peter

Peter's family moved to the United States from a war-torn country in Africa. Most of the time, Peter is gentle and quiet. But occasionally, he seems sullen and fearful. Some classmates tease Peter, and Peter's friends worry about him when that happens. When his friends ask Peter how he is feeling, he says he's worried about his extended family back in Africa. Peter's friends decide to ask their pastor what they might say or do to help Peter when he's feeling blue.

Jeff

After his little brother was beaten up by a bully on the elementary school playground, Jeff started working hard to make his friends and classmates aware of the problem of bullying. Jeff wants his friends to help him start a committee to launch an antibullying campaign for the entire middle school. Jeff's friends really don't want to be known as leaders of this effort and have started to avoid him whenever they see him coming.

For each story, think about:

- Who is wrestling with rejection or fear in this story?
- How do you think God might be at work in this situation?
- If these people were your friends, what would you do?