

THE REJECTED STONE IN THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS: DEFENDING THE AUTHENTICITY OF JESUS' QUOTATION OF PS 118:22

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When Jesus closes one of his most important and divisive parables, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33–46 // Mark 12:1–12 // Luke 20:9–19), he appears to do something he never does anywhere else: quote an OT passage to conclude a parable.¹ In a parable that is “one of the most significant, most discussed, and most complicated of all the parables,”² several issues have been highly debated. Is the parable a pure allegory or a natural story? If it is an allegory, whom do each of the characters (landlord, tenants, servants, son) represent in Jesus' context? Is it merely a later expression of incipient anti-Jewish sentiment? Is the shortened version in *Thomas* L.65–66 the earliest and most authentic version? At the center of this eddy of questions is that very quotation that ends the parable, in which Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 (LXX 117), saying, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”³ For decades the scholarly consensus held that that this quotation is neither original to the parable nor spoken by Jesus but a later addition or redaction by the early church.⁴ While several commentators have identified arguments against this default view, a fresh and comprehensive assessment of the evidence in favor of the quotation's authenticity is due. Moreover, the framework used to evaluate this particular case shows how any approach to resolving similar problems should integrate data from three areas: the detailed exegetical data of the passages in question, the literary tradition informing the interpretation of the audience, and the first-century context.

I. THE CONTRARY PERSPECTIVE: INAUTHENTICITY OF THE STONE QUOTATION

Many scholars have argued on various grounds that the entire Parable of the Wicked Tenants, including the Psalm 118 quotation, is not original to Jesus.⁵ Even

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¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation* (WUNT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983) 64.

² Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 276.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the ESV.

⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC 35c; Dallas: Word, 1993) 949. See also Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 62.

⁵ The crux of the argument lies in whether the parable is pure allegory (and, thus, a later literary creation by the early church) or a natural parable. Scholars such as Jülicher, Bultmann, and Kümmel cite the lack of introductory formula, the unnaturalness of an absentee landlord building a vineyard and immedi-

among many scholars who otherwise associate some version of the parable, perhaps even an unknown kernel form, with Jesus, there is “no doubt, however, that the stone quotations were later additions” by the early church,⁶ for several reasons. (1) Proponents of this theory maintain that there is a disjointed and unnatural shift from the agricultural imagery of the parable proper to the architectural quality of the builders/stone/cornerstone imagery.⁷ (2) Some have argued that there “appears to be no logical connection to the parable itself,”⁸ but rather that the stone quotation functions as a partial new parable that later Christian redactors inserted from an early *testimonia* collection of apologetic texts.⁹ This OT citation, it is argued, is an attempt by the church to read Jesus as the rejected/vindicated “stone” into a parable that they had already plainly interpreted as one of Jesus’ predictions of his passion and resurrection—a predictive prophecy which, on critical grounds, must be rejected *a priori*.¹⁰ (3) Further support of this argument is sought in Matthew’s and Luke’s explicit connection between the “stone” and the “son” who is killed “out[side] of the vineyard” (Matt 21:39; Luke 20:15). Since the (arguably earlier) Mark and *Thomas* fail to mention this detail, it is evidence of a later attempt by the church to force a connection between the stone, the parable’s son character, and Jesus’ crucifixion outside Jerusalem.¹¹ (4) Among those who hold that the parable in *Thomas*, stripped of the allegorical elements added by the later tradition in the Synoptics, is the earliest and purest “skeleton form” of the parable,¹² the stone is excluded from the original parable since it appears in a separate logion.¹³ In short,

ately leasing it to tenants to tend, and the resulting lack of intelligibility apart from an allegorical reading as evidence that the parable “is a community product ... [which] does not go back to the historical Jesus” (Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007] 541); see also Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 4–10.

⁶ Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 5; Dodd and Jeremias are the chief proponents of this view, though Jeremias retains allegorical elements as authorial additions by Mark (absent in *Thomas*) while Dodd sweeps away all allegorizing tendencies.

⁷ Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 95.

⁸ E.g. Jülicher, Loisy, Dodd, Smith, Jeremias, Hengel, Klauck (Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 62).

⁹ Charles A. Kimball III, “Jesus’ Exposition of Scripture in Luke 20:9–19: An Inquiry in Light of Jewish Hermeneutics,” *BBR* 3 (1993) 92. See note 85 below regarding the *testimonia* theory.

¹⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33b; Dallas: Word, 1995) 619; Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 107.

¹¹ Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 60, 202. Against this view is the fact that neither Matthew nor Luke explicitly highlights that Jesus is taken outside the city to be killed, whereas, ironically, Mark does (ἐξόυσον in 15:20). Moreover, while Kümmel argues that “son” lacked messianic significance at the time and could only be attributed to the later Christian teaching (Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 285), Qumran evidence has undermined this hypothesis (e.g. 4QFlor1:11 and 1QSa 2:11–12; see Kimball, “Jesus’ Exposition” 80).

¹² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XIV* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 1280. For detailed arguments for the priority of *Thomas* for the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, see Hugh Montefiore and H. E. W. Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (SBT 35; London: SCM, 1962) 62–64; and April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (LNTS 287; New York: T&T Clark, 2006) 10, 215. DeConick argues somewhat boldly that *Thomas* L.65–66 is part of an original kernel gospel dating to AD 50–60.

¹³ Klyne Snodgrass, “Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants,” *BBR* 8 (1998) 193.

whether one holds to the originality of the parable itself or not, “the most frequently heard comment about ... the parable concerns the concluding quotation of Ps 118:22,” which is held to be secondary.¹⁴ Recent scholarship, however, has begun to turn the tide on this view. As it will be shown, there are three lines of evidence that support its authenticity, each of which demonstrate the importance of maintaining a balanced approach for addressing similar issues.

II. EXEGETICAL DATA: ANALYSIS OF THE SYNOPTIC PASSAGES

First, the details of the texts in question present solid evidence that the narratives, as they present in each gospel account, form a cohesive whole inclusive of the Psalm 118 quotation. Since a full discussion of the various redactional variances among Synoptic accounts is unnecessary for the present scope, the analysis will be limited to the salient textual data.

1. *The narrative frame: the vineyard.* All three evangelists present the setting of the parable in a landlord’s vineyard that is alluding clearly to Isa 5:1–2. The first verse of each account, structured to highlight the grammatical parallelism, reads as follows:

Matt 21:33	Mark 12:1	Luke 20:9
ἄνθρωπος ἦν οἰκοδεσπότης ὅστις ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα καὶ φραγμὸν αὐτῷ περιέθηκεν καὶ ὤρυξεν ἐν αὐτῷ ληνὸν καὶ ψυκοδόμησεν πύργον καὶ ἐξέδετο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν.	ἀμπελῶνα ἄνθρωπος ἐφύτευσεν ¹⁵ καὶ περιέθηκεν φραγμὸν καὶ ὤρυξεν ὑπολήνιον καὶ ψυκοδόμησεν πύργον καὶ ἐξέδετο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν.	ἄνθρωπός [τις] ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα καὶ ἐξέδετο αὐτὸν γεωργοῖς καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν χρόνους ἱκανούς

The three accounts differ on a few minor details, such as the inclusion of “master of the house” (οἰκοδεσπότης) in Matthew, the dative pronouns in Matthew (αὐτῷ), the added detail of “a long while” (χρόνους ἱκανούς) in Luke, and, most notably, the absence of the three aorist clauses relating to the fence, winepress, and tower in Luke. The similarities in parallel wording are otherwise extensive. Most notably, all three accounts are drawing on the vineyard poem in Isa 5:1–2, which reads as follows in the LXX (with Mark for comparison):

¹⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34C; Dallas: Word, 2001) 228.

¹⁵ The best MSS (Ⲡ B C and others) have the reading shown; NA27 lists a few lesser MSS (W Θ F¹³ 565. 2542. sy^p among others) as reading ἄνθρωπος τις ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα, likely an assimilation of the Lukan variant.

Isa 5:1–2 (LXX) ¹⁶	Mark 12:1
<u>ἀμπελῶν</u> ἐγενήθη τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ ἐν κέρατι, ἐν τόπῳ πίονι. (a) <u>καὶ φραγμὸν περιέθηκα</u> καὶ ἐχαράκωσα καὶ ἐφύτευσα ἀμπελον σωρήχ (b) <u>καὶ ὠκοδόμησα πύργον</u> ἐν μέσῳ αὐτοῦ <u>καὶ προλήνιον ὠρυξα</u> ἐν αὐτῷ	<u>ἀμπελῶνα</u> ἄνθρωπος ἐφύτευσεν <u>καὶ περιέθηκεν φραγμὸν</u> <u>καὶ ὠρυξεν ὑπολήνιον</u> (c) <u>καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν πύργον</u>

Mark and the other two evangelists closely follow the LXX; the only meaningful differences apart from verb tense are (a) the change to the introduction, which is understandable given how Isaiah 5 presents as a song about “my beloved”; (b) the omission of the second verbal clause dealing with the trench and vines (where the LXX is following the MT); and (c) the change of order for the winepress (ὑπολήνιον or προλήνιον) and tower (πύργον).¹⁷

The connections to Isaiah extend beyond this initial setup. Near the end of the parable in all three accounts, there arises a question regarding what the owner of the vineyard should do, which draws upon the language of the question in Isa 5:4:

Isa 5:4 (LXX) ¹⁸	Matt 21:40b	Mark 12:9	Luke 20:15b
<u>τί ποιήσω ἔτι</u> τῷ <u>ἀμπελώνι</u> μου καὶ οὐκ ἐποίησα αὐτῷ;	ὅταν <u>οὖν</u> ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος τοῦ <u>ἀμπελῶνος</u> . <u>τί</u> <u>ποιήσει</u> τοῖς γεωργοῖς ἐκείνοις;	<u>τί</u> [οὖν] ¹⁹ <u>ποιήσει</u> ὁ κύριος τοῦ <u>ἀμπελῶνος</u> ;	<u>τί οὖν ποιήσει</u> αὐτοῖς ²⁰ ὁ κύριος τοῦ <u>ἀμπελῶνος</u> ;

Though the personal referent obviously varies from the first person speaker in Isaiah to the Synoptics’ “owner of the vineyard,” the remaining parallels are evident.²¹

Three preliminary implications arise from this obvious and intentional framing of the parable using the vineyard imagery of Isaiah 5. (1) Though it is often missed by commentators given the emphasis on the LXX reading, Jesus’ original hearing audience would have easily picked up on the missing allusion that is prominent in the original Hebrew: the builder of the vineyard “cleared it of stones” (5:2a,

¹⁶ All Septuagint texts are taken from Rahlfs-Hanhart (1935). For comparison, Oswalt translates the MT, “A vineyard belonged to my beloved, on a fruitful hill. He dug it up and removed its stones; he planted it with good vines. He built a tower in its midst, and also a wine vat he hewed out in it” (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1–39* [NICOT]; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 149–50).

¹⁷ See further discussion in Collins, *Mark* 545.

¹⁸ The MT reads מָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עוֹד לְבַרְמִי. Oswalt translates, “What more should be done for my vineyard?” (*Isaiah* 150).

¹⁹ NA27 lists several MSS that exclude the οὖν, but the better witnesses (Ⲡ A C D W Θ Ψ) all include it.

²⁰ Per NA27, D and a few minor witnesses exclude αὐτοῖς, likely assimilating with Mark and Matthew.

²¹ Collins, *Mark* 541; Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 62; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 287.

which reads וַיִּסְקְלוּהוּ²² before planting the vine. Though the gospels suppress this detail, they are appealing to a broader contextual field in Isaiah that includes it,²³ thus lending unity to the overall structure: Isa 5:1–2 “stones” → parable proper → Ps 118:22 “stone.”²⁴ (2) The ties to Isaiah alleviate the criticism that the shift from agricultural to architectural imagery means the Psalm 118 stone passage is an illogical appendage. Not only is the “intermingling of the agricultural and architectural metaphors ... not unusual in Jewish literature,”²⁵ it occurs in Isa 5:7 itself, where the הַיְהוּדָה קְרָם (‘‘vineyard of the LORD’’) is equated with בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (‘‘house of Israel’’). (3) The Isaianic frame guides the interpretation of the parable and lays the groundwork for the stone quotation. Isaiah 5 draws on a common OT metaphor of the nation of Israel as a vineyard or garden,²⁶ but with a twist: in Isaiah’s mind, the vineyard has failed to produce good fruit (Isa 5:4b), resulting in its rejection and destruction (5:5–6).²⁷ This allusion, then, produces the expectation in the mind of Jesus’ hearers that the parable refers in some way to the people of God and their judgment;²⁸ as will be shown in III.2 below, this initial expectation is consummated vividly by the stone quotation.

2. *The dramatic turning point: sending the ‘‘beloved son.’’* The conflict in the parable is driven forward by the tenant’s continual rejection and abuse of multiple waves of the owner’s servants. The climax is reached when the landlord decides to send his ‘‘beloved son’’:

²² In the Piel stem, סָקַל means ‘‘free from stones’’ (BDB 709); see Oswalt’s translation above in note 16.

²³ This has been well established by C. H. Dodd (*According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* [London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1952] 126) and is widely accepted today (Andrew Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John* [WUNT 158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003] 19).

²⁴ See discussion in Kimball, ‘‘Jesus’ Exposition of Scripture’’ 88, 89 n. 51.

²⁵ Snodgrass, ‘‘Recent Research’’ 203. See also Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 96: ‘‘The first century listener probably would not have been distracted by the transition from the vineyard imagery to the building imagery since this transition appears to have been common’’ (he cites 1QS VIII.5 and 1 Cor 3:9).

²⁶ E.g. Isa 1:8, 3:14; Ezek 19:10. See also *Herm. Sim.* 5.2.1–5.7.3 for an extended parable that envisions the people of God as a vineyard; notably, the parable in *Hermas* begins very similarly to the Synoptics and *Thomas*: ‘‘A certain man had an estate, and many slaves, and a portion of his estate he planted as a vineyard Then the master of the servant went away to travel abroad’’ (J. B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* [1892; ed. J. R. Harmer; repr. Kessinger, 2003] 204).

²⁷ Oswalt, *Isaiah* 152. The Isaianic targum makes the rejection of the Israel-vineyard rather explicit: ‘‘[5:1] Now I will sing unto Israel, who is like unto a vine [2] I propped them up as a precious vine [3] They have revolted from the law [4] I have thought they should do good; but they have done evil [5] I will cause my Shekinah to remove from them’’ (C. W. H. Pauli, *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah* [London: London’s Society House, 1871] 15–16).

²⁸ Nolland, *Luke* 950; Hagner, *Matthew* 619.

Matt 21:37 ²⁹	Mark 12:6	Luke 20:13b ²⁹
ὅστερον δὲ <u>ἀπέστειλεν</u> πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὸν <u>υἱὸν αὐτοῦ</u> λέγων· <u>ἐντραπήσονται</u> τὸν <u>υἱὸν μου</u>	ἔτι ἓνα εἶχεν <u>υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν</u> . ³⁰ <u>ἀπέστειλεν</u> αὐτὸν ἔσχατον πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγων ὅτι <u>ἐντραπήσονται</u> τὸν <u>υἱὸν μου</u>	τί ποιήσω; <u>πέμψω</u> τὸν <u>υἱὸν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν</u> · ἴσως τοῦτον <u>ἐντραπήσονται</u>

Two significant observations bear on the authenticity of the Psalm 118. First, numerous scholars have recognized that the narrative flow from the body of the parable to the stone quotation hinges to a large degree on the “son”/“stone” wordplay, which, though obviously lost in the Greek (υἱός and λίθος), would have been glaringly obvious in the Aramaic: ܩܒ and ܩܒܐ.³¹ Not only does this wordplay tie together the two central images—the rejected son and the rejected stone³²—but it also decreases the likelihood that later Greek-speaking Christians would have added the stone quotation.³³ Second, though Matthew (and *Thomas*)³⁴ do not append the adjective “beloved” (ἀγαπητόν) to “son,”³⁵ it is plain that Mark and Luke intend it to be understood as a clear allusion to the broader “son” motif—both as it develops in the OT³⁶ and obtains widespread use in the Gospels³⁷—as well as to their nearly identical wording about Jesus previously (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός in both Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22; cf. the same wording in Matt 3:17). In other words, the Gospel writers deliberately associate the parable’s “beloved son,” who stands at the turning point of the parable, with the “stone,” the Son figure, and Jesus himself.

3. *The resolution: narrative structure around the stone quotation.* After the murder of the “son,” all three accounts follow a similar narrative structure that builds up to and flows from the stone quotation. A summary of this structure is shown below:

²⁹ NA27 lists no significant textual variants for the Matthew and minor variants for Luke.

³⁰ Per NA27, a few minor MSS lack ἀγαπητόν; the majority include it (Ⲛ B C D L Δ Θ Ψ and others).

³¹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 290; Hagner, *Matthew* 622; Collins, *Mark* 549; Nolland, *Luke* 949.

³² Notably, the Aramaic targum substantiates this wordplay by substituting “son” for “stone” in Ps 118:22: “The boy which the builders abandoned was among the sons of Jesse” (Evans, *Word* 229, 238; see also Brunson, *Psalm 118*, 41).

³³ “Is it really plausible to argue that this complicated Aramaic-based exegesis is the result of the Greek-speaking, LXX-reading church? Surely not. It is more plausible to view this as fragments of an agenda generated by Jesus” (Evans, *Mark* 229).

³⁴ *Thomas* L65.6 reads, “Then the master sent his son. He said, ‘Perhaps they will be ashamed in front of my son’” (DeConick, *Gospel of Thomas* 38).

³⁵ Hagner notes that this omission may indicate the priority of the Matthean version (*Matthew* 618).

³⁶ As mentioned above (n. 11), while some scholars (e.g. Kümmel; see Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 285) have previously claimed that “son” does not have any messianic overtones by the first century, it was clearly confirmed at Qumran as a pre-Christian messianic title (Kimball, “Jesus’ Exposition of Scripture” 81). NT writers draw the “son” tradition from Ps 2:7, Dan 7:13, and Ezek 2:1 (and numerous others in Ezekiel).

³⁷ Notably, the use of “Son of God” (Matthew: 7 times; Mark: 2; Luke: 6) and “Son of Man” (Matthew: 28; Mark: 13; Luke: 25) as titles for Christ.

	Matt 21:40–46	Mark 12:9–12	Luke 20:15b–19
A: Jesus' question ³⁸	τί ποιήσει τοῖς γεωργοῖς ἐκεῖνοις...	τί [οὖν] ποιήσει ὁ κύριος...	τί οὖν ποιήσει αὐτοῖς ὁ κύριος...
B: Response of scribes / Pharisees	ἀπολέσει αὐτούς καὶ τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἐκδώσεται ἄλλοις γεωργοῖς	ἀπολέσει τοὺς γεωργοὺς καὶ δώσει τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἄλλοις ³⁹	ἀκούσαντες δὲ εἶπαν· μὴ γένοιτο
C: Ps 118:22 quotation ⁴⁰	οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς...	οὐδὲ τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην ἀνέγνωτε...	τί οὖν ἐστὶν τὸ γεγραμμένον τοῦτο...
A': Jesus' interpretation ⁴¹	παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν...	παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν...	πᾶς ὁ πεσὼν ἐπ' ἐκείνον τὸν λίθον συνθλασθήσεται...
B': Response of the scribes / Pharisees	Καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει...	Καὶ ἐζήτησαν αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν ὄχλον, ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν εἶπεν	καὶ ἐζήτησαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸν... ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπεν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην

Though the details vary in certain cases, the narratives are *structurally* identical (A → B → C → A' → B') and, importantly, pivot on the Psalm 118 quotation—without which the conclusion sequence of the entire narrative does not hold together. Jesus prompts a response from his audience;⁴² they respond with anger regarding the parable's implications. It is only after the quote and Jesus' interpretation, however, that the scribes and Pharisees realize that “he had told the parable against them” (Luke 20:19; see IV.1 below). Put differently, without the quote, the encounter ends with an abstract speculation by the audience; upon hearing Ps 118:22, however, they realize that Jesus is directly condemning them. The plot of the encounter simply would not resolve if Psalm 118 were merely a later addition.

4. *Quoting Psalm 118: the stone and the result.* Finally, some attention must be paid, of course, to the textual details surrounding the Psalm quotation itself. All three Gospels present an exact reproduction of the LXX rendering:

³⁸ See the full verses (Matt 21:40b // Mark 12:9 // Luke 20:15b) in II.1 above.

³⁹ In contrast to Matthew but similar to Luke, the Markan account puts these words on the lips of Jesus.

⁴⁰ See the details for the Ps 118:22 quotation below in II.4.

⁴¹ Jesus' response will be dealt with in further detail below in II.4.

⁴² Interestingly, while *Thomas* lacks many of the narrative details of the Synoptics, L.65:8 also includes an interpretive proclamation by Jesus between the death of the son and before the stone quotation: “Whoever has ears should listen!” (DeConick, *Gospel of Thomas* 38).

Ps 118:22 (LXX 117:22) ⁴³	Matt 21:42b // Mark 12:10b // Luke 20:17b ⁴⁴
λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας	λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας

The quotation is preceded by a common introductory formula for OT citations (e.g. ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς // τὴν γραφήν // τὸ γεγραμμένον, as shown in II.3 above). “Stone” (λίθον) is in the accusative, rather than the expected nominative, because it has adopted the accusative case of the contiguous relative pronoun (ὃν);⁴⁵ the aorist active ἀπεδοκίμασαν is rightly translated “rejected” by nearly all English translations;⁴⁶ the substantival participle οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες is rightly taken as “the builders”;⁴⁷ and the concluding accusative-genitive κεφαλὴν γωνίας is a technical term closely similar to ἀκρογωνιαίος and is best taken as “cornerstone.”⁴⁸

While the actual quotation of the main stone passage is identical across all three, each gospel writer presents a slightly different angle on how Jesus interprets and applies Ps 118:22 to the audience. Matthew and Mark agree against Luke in extending the quotation to 118:23, with the identical reading as the LXX.⁴⁹ Mark lets this quotation stand alone as Jesus’ concluding word; Matthew, however, continues on in 21:43 by “adding an emphatic saying of Jesus that elaborates the statement that the vineyard will be given to others.”⁵⁰ Luke, in contrast, elaborates on the Psalm 118 stone by blending two additional allusions from Isaiah and Daniel:

⁴³ The MT reads פָּנֵה לְרֵאשִׁית הַיְתָח הַבְּנוֹיִם מֵאֲבָן מִצֵּיטוֹן; though many translations (e.g. ESV) take the final two words as “cornerstone,” literally they would denote “head of the corner” (Collins, *Mark* 548); extensive scholarship has focused on exactly what architectural feature is in view (capstone, foundation stone, etc.), but the resolution is not necessary for the present purposes.

⁴⁴ Importantly, the textual tradition is solid; NA27 lists no textual variants in any of the gospel accounts.

⁴⁵ An instance of *casus pendens* (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 51–52); see also Evans, *Mark* 238.

⁴⁶ J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Part I* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992) 50; BDAG 110, def. 2. English translations include ESV, NIV84, NAS, KJV, ASV. The LXX is accurately reflecting the underlying Hebrew דָּמָא, which is best taken as “reject” (BDB 549).

⁴⁷ BDAG 696; the aspectual force of this present participle is likely diminished (Wallace, *ExSyn* 619–621).

⁴⁸ BDAG 39, 209, and 541; see also Louw & Nida 7.44. Compare to Eph 2:20 (and see n. 90).

⁴⁹ Matt 21:42b // Mark 12:11 and the LXX read: παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη, καὶ ἐστὶν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν. The ESV translates, “This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

⁵⁰ Collins, *Mark* 549. The Greek reads, διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀρθήσεται ἀφ’ ὑμῶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ δοθήσεται ἐθνῶν ποιῶντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς (“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits,” ESV).

Isa 8:14	Dan 2:34–35,44–45	Luke 20:18 ⁵¹
λίθου <u>προσκόμῃσσι</u> συναντήσεσθε αὐτῷ, οὐδὲ ὡς πέτρας πτώματι	v34: λίθος ἐξ ὄρους v35: ὁ λίθος ὁ <u>πατάσας</u> v44: <u>λεπυνεῖ</u> καὶ <u>λικμήσει</u> v45: λίθος ... <u>ἐλέπτυνε</u>	πᾶς ὁ <u>πεσών</u> ἐπ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν λίθον <u>συνθλασθήσεται</u> ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσι, <u>λικμήσει</u> αὐτόν

Though the precise wording varies at numerous points, the combined allusion is well established⁵² and is used by Luke to describe how the rejected stone functions in “two further ways ... bring[ing] disaster upon those who stumble over it ... [and] disaster to those on whom it falls.”⁵³ Notably, a significant textual variant in Matt 21:44 renders the exact same allusion as Luke, possibly bringing Luke into closer alignment with Matthew.⁵⁴

Furthermore, *Thomas* L.65–66, which shares similar overall structure with the Synoptics though lacking as much detail, is concluded by the same stone quotation: “Jesus said, ‘Show me the stone that the builders rejected. It is the cornerstone’” (L.66).⁵⁵ While the alleged Gnosticizing tendencies of *Thomas* are apparent even in this parable account,⁵⁶ it provides a useful data point. If *Thomas* is dependent in some way on the Synoptics, as many maintain,⁵⁷ then it is notable that the author does not exclude the stone quotation as a later accretion but retains it in connection to the parable. If *Thomas* instead reflects an earlier, more pristine textual or oral tradition,⁵⁸ then evidently the stone quotation was part of that earlier form. Either way, the inclusion of Ps 118:22 in L.66 after the parable is strong corroboration of its authenticity.⁵⁹

In sum, the preliminary analysis shows all three Synoptics as well as *Thomas* using Ps 118:22 in some way to elucidate the parable. On one level, the simple fact

⁵¹ The ESV translates, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

⁵² Note the underlined words in the table: (1) προσκόμῃσσι in Isa 8:14 (“stumbling,” BDAG 882) connects to Luke’s use of πεσών (“fall,” BDAG 815); (2) πατάσας in Dan 2:34 (“strike a heavy blow,” BDAG 786) and λεπυνεῖ in Dan 2:44 (“break to pieces,” see J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Part II* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996] 280) connect to Luke’s use of συνθλασθήσεται (“crush”; see Lust et al., *Lexicon of the Septuagint* 458); (3) λικμήσει appears in both Dan 2:44 and Luke.

⁵³ Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1286.

⁵⁴ NA27 includes the entire quotation in Matt 21:44 in single brackets and lists numerous corroborating witnesses (⊗ B C L W Z Θ and others); a minority of MSS (D 33 it sy^s Or Eus^{ss}) exclude the quotation. See Hagner, *Matthew* 616–617 note (h); see also Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 296.

⁵⁵ DeConick, *Gospel of Thomas* 38.

⁵⁶ Some observe that the phrasing of L.66 indicates that the “stone” is not Jesus himself, but rather “true gnosis,” which is further evidenced by the clearly gnostic L.67, which deals with “whoever believes in the All ...” (Montefiore and Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists* 54). Snodgrass argues that L.65–66 is part of a three-parable series that all deal with gnosis in some way (“Recent Research” 195).

⁵⁷ See argument and viewpoints in Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Snodgrass, “Recent Research” 194.

⁵⁸ Nolland, *Luke* 948; DeConick, *Gospel of Thomas* 217; see summary in Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1280.

⁵⁹ Evans, *Mark* 219. Many scholars who hold to an early dating of *Thomas* believe L.65 and 66 go together.

that Jesus is concluding the parable with a quotation is itself notable, for he does this in no other extant parable.⁶⁰ Which is more plausible: that the early church would add an OT quotation *only* to this parable and try to pass it off as authentic, though no similar examples exist? Or that the extant reading preserved across four accounts is authentic precisely because it lacks precedent? A yet more important question must be asked, however: does the way in which the stone quotation would function among Jesus' hearers give any indication that it is authentic in his discourse?

III. LITERARY TRADITION: INTERTEXTUAL ECHOES OF THE PSALM 118 STONE

If it can be demonstrated that Jesus' use of Ps 118:22 coheres with the overall theme or rhetorical impulse of the parable as Jesus himself (and not just the early church) intended it, then the case for its originality would be further strengthened. The optimal way of proceeding is to attempt to view things from the perspective of Jesus' hearing audience, testing whether the stone quotation would have been *for them* a natural, intuitive extension of the parable or a jarring and unnatural shift. In other words, what themes, allusions, or "thoughts sprang to to the Jewish mind when encountering Psalm 118"⁶¹—and how well do they relate to the parable itself?

1. *The historical and interpretive context of Psalm 118.* When Jesus uses Ps 118:22 (and 118:23, in Matthew and Mark), it is clear from the evidence that he is not merely proof-texting—which is what one would expect if the church simply took a quotation from some *testimonia* and placed it on his lips in later redactions—but rather drawing in numerous ways on the broader context of the entire psalm.⁶²

Numerous views have been proposed for the original *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 118, which can be grouped under two categories: the agricultural occasion and the kingly occasion. Some have suggested that the psalm originated as part of an autumn agricultural festival,⁶³ likely related to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering.⁶⁴ Others have argued that the psalm is set against a kingship backdrop, in which the Davidic king reenacts the enthronement of Yahweh over

⁶⁰ Snodgrass, "Recent Research" 202–203 and *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 64; Kimball, "Jesus' Ex-position" 80, n. 16.

⁶¹ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 26.

⁶² Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* 126–27. Notably for the present thesis, Dodd concludes that the NT authors particularly treat Isaiah and Psalms this way: "The *selection* of certain large sections of the Old Testament scriptures, especially from Isaiah, Jeremiah ... and from the Psalms ... were understood as *wholes*, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context In the fundamental passages it is the *total context* that is in view" (emphases original).

⁶³ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 26–27, 36. Later mishnaic tradition associated it likewise with a festival setting.

⁶⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms* (K&D 5; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 223. Exod 23:16 institutes the feast "at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor" (ESV). Arguments regarding the temporal setting are wide-ranging from monarchical to exilic to post-exilic.

Israel.⁶⁵ The textual evidence within the psalm itself, though never mentioning the “king” explicitly, reads like other royal psalms and suggests that the king, who alone could be “surrounded” by “all nations” (118:10), is leading the ascent.⁶⁶ A synthesis of the agricultural and the kingly seems likely: the king often plays a role in festival processions;⁶⁷ the psalm alludes directly to the humiliation and reconsecration of the king; thus, “the autumn festival may have combined a celebration of Yahweh’s kingship with a confirmation of the Davidic office.”⁶⁸ Further uniting both the harvest and the kingship concepts is the emphasis in the psalm itself on the entrance into the temple, where the firstfruits are brought and where the true king, Yahweh, sits enthroned (118:19–20).⁶⁹

These emphases on kingship, celebration, and the temple are further intensified as the psalm was reinterpreted over time, especially after the exilic period. First, intertestamental literature suggests that, while there may or may not have been uniformity among streams of Judaism regarding the expectation of the Messiah or coming Davidic king, some level of expectation was nonetheless present. Psalm 118 and others like it, then, became increasingly framed by Jewish interpreters in terms of messianic or Davidic anticipation and “gave rise to eschatological expectations of a figure would live up to the ideal” of kingship—made all the more acute by the post-exilic political context of its later interpreters.⁷⁰ Second, the Jewish community, including Jesus’ contemporaries in the first century, incorporated Psalm 118 (along with 113–117) into the Hallel liturgy used to celebrate divine redemption during major Jewish festivals. The singing of the Hallel was most prominent during Passover, and, importantly, the recitation of Psalm 118 provided the climactic movement of the Hallel.⁷¹ This Passover tie is reinforced by the several intertextual connections scholars have identified between Psalm 118 itself and Exodus 14–15, thus providing yet another interpretive frame for the psalm in the intertestamental period: echoes of the original exodus and expectation of a new exodus.⁷² The combination of these two frames (messianism and exodus) in the mind of the first century Jew, when hearing Jesus quote from the psalm, would, thus,

⁶⁵ Numerous variants of this hypothesis have been proposed with varying success, such as Mowinkel’s “Enthronement Festival,” Kraus’ “Royal Zion Festival,” and Weiser’s “Covenant Renewal Festival”—all of which focus on the apparent parallelism between Israel’s monarch and the reaffirmation of Yahweh’s ultimate kingship (Brunson, *Psalm 118* 29–36).

⁶⁶ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 36.

⁶⁷ See 2 Samuel 6; 1 Kgs 3:4; and 1 Kgs 9:25 (some argue that the “three times a year” in which Solomon made sacrifices correspond precisely to the three great festivals, of which Tabernacles was the most important; see Brunson, *Psalm 118* 31 n. 52).

⁶⁸ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 32. Some scholars further propose that the kingly occasion of the psalm incorporates military victory, with the victories of battles begun in the spring being celebrated at the autumn festival (Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150* [WBC 21; Dallas: Word, 1983] 121).

⁶⁹ Allen, *Psalms* 125.

⁷⁰ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 43–44.

⁷¹ Allen, *Psalms* 124; Brunson, *Psalm 118* 77.

⁷² Brunson, *Psalm 118* 78; see also Allen (*Psalms* 124), on the echoes of the exodus “song of victory.”

“focus on Exodus but move to Zion.”⁷³ Put differently, for the first century audience, Psalm 118 serves to connect the fulfillment of the original exodus with a future, eschatological redemption by Yahweh through the reestablishment of a Davidic king/Messiah in Zion.

This twofold trajectory comes to the fore in how the Gospel writers develop the surrounding context of the parable. Significantly, Jesus delivers the parable during the week of Passover, when the Hallel, including Psalm 118, would have been a prominent fixture among those celebrating the exodus event. Moreover, the Synoptics apply Psalm 118 itself to Jesus in the entrance narrative, which occurs just prior to Jesus’ giving the parable. Drawing explicitly on Ps 118:25–26, they portray Jesus as the coming Davidic king, the one whose entrance during Passover signals a new Exodus,⁷⁴ “the one who comes in the name of the LORD”:

Ps 118:26 (LXX 117:26)	Matt 21:9b	Mark 11:9	Luke 19:38
εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου	ὡσαννὰ ⁷⁵ <u>τῷ υἱῷ Δαυὶδ</u> εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου	ὡσαννὰ ⁷⁵ εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου	εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος <u>ὁ βασιλεὺς</u> ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου

Note that what Psalm 118 and Mark leave unstated is directly expressed by Matthew and Luke: the coming one, Christ Jesus, is “the King,” the “son of David.” That is, they directly connect the subject of Psalm 118:22–26 and its kingly undertones with the person of Jesus.

These dynamics yield a range of implications regarding the first-century Jewish background understanding of Psalm 118 and its connection to the Wicked Tenants parable. (1) Just as Isaiah 5, which formed the opening frame of the parable, inserted architectural imagery into an agricultural scene (see II.1 above), so also does Psalm 118. Amid a psalm celebrating the ingathering of the harvest, the stone-cornerstone image in 118:22 is incorporated with no apparent incongruity, neither for the Psalmist nor the Jewish reader.⁷⁶ Thus, the concern about the discontinuous shift in imagery simply is not relevant for Jesus’ original audience. (2) In an exilic and post-exilic understanding of Psalm 118—or for a first century Jew under the rule of Rome and awaiting a liberator—the absence of the proper Davidic king

⁷³ Patrick D. Miller, “The End of the Psalter: A Response to Erich Zenger,” *JOTF* 80 (1998) 104. He notes that the canonical position of Psalm 118 further elucidates this bridge, as Psalms 120–134 focus on the Zion-Temple.

⁷⁴ The motif of a second exodus in the Synoptics and John is well-established in the literature. As a simple example, Matt 2:6, speaking of a coming king from Judah, draws on Mic 5:1–2, which adds in the LXX that “his exoduses were [foretold] from the beginning, from eternity” (author’s own translation of καὶ αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος).

⁷⁵ The Greek term ὡσαννὰ in Matthew and Mark is drawn not from the LXX 117:25 (which reads simply ὁ Κύριε) but from the MT of 117:25, which reads, הַשִּׁישִׁי.

⁷⁶ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 23–26.

from Israel would clearly connect to the absence of the landlord from the vineyard. The question, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?” (Mark 12:9a), takes on a new angle with this context: will the absent monarch return and set things right? Will Yahweh ultimately be faithful to deliver his people? (3) The allusions of Psalm 118 to the original exodus and the Passover tradition would make immediate connections to the death of the “beloved son” in the parable. To Jesus’ audience that is in fact preparing for the upcoming Passover, there is a dramatic turnaround in the parable: whereas the firstborn children were spared in the original Passover, the cherished son of the landlord is not.⁷⁷

(4) The kingship and temple background of Psalm 118 become particularly important when one considers the placement of the parable in its broader narrative sequence about Jesus. As opposed to many instances in which the gospel accounts shuffle the placement of the parables, this parable’s chronological context matters greatly.⁷⁸ All three Synoptics have Jesus telling the parable after two major events in his journey towards the cross: his triumphal entry and his cleansing of the temple.⁷⁹ Having envisioned his entrance into Jerusalem in kingly terms, the writers immediately describe how the Jewish leaders begin to challenge Jesus’ authority following his dramatic moment in the temple. The inclusion of Ps 118:22 thus makes clear why Jesus, standing amid the temple precincts, responds to their questions in part with the Parable of the Wicked Tenants: his authority comes from the fact that he *is* the long-awaited Davidic king or Messiah in view in the psalm; he is the “one who comes in the name of the Lord” to enter through the temple’s “gates of righteousness” (118:19) and secure its restoration.⁸⁰

(5) Finally, the rejection motif in Ps 118:22 would have produced a stunning reversal in the minds of Jesus’ hearers. In the original context of the psalm, the leaders of Israel (e.g. “house of Aaron,” 118:3) were the ones responsible for recognizing and lauding the coming of the kingly figure.⁸¹ The rejected stone in its original context signifies Yahweh’s vindication of the Davidic king from the oppression of his enemies, who are referred to as the “builders.”⁸² However, the parable teaches that these same leaders—the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus addresses—are actually the tenants who reject the son; *they* are the builders who reject the stone-king! Strikingly, Jesus has anticipated precisely this rejection previously through yet more allusions to this pivotal psalm. In Mark 8:31 and 9:12, Jesus

⁷⁷ This may account for the strong anger initially expressed by Jesus’ audience when they hear of the son’s death (Matt 21:41, “put those wretches to a miserable death”).

⁷⁸ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 287.

⁷⁹ The sequence for all three Synoptics is as follows: (a) triumphal entry; (b) temple cleansing; (c) Jesus’ authority questioned; and (d) Parable of the Wicked Tenants. Matthew: (a) 21:1–11; (b) 21:12–13; (c) 21:23–27; and (d) 21:33–46. Mark: (a) 11:1–11; (b) 11:15–19; (c) 11:27–33; and (d) 12:1–12. Luke: (a) 19:28–40; (b) 19:45–48; (c) 20:1–8; (d) 20:9–18. Note that in Matthew, Wicked Tenants is the second of three consecutive parables told against the leaders (Hagner, *Matthew* 617).

⁸⁰ Wright observes that the use of Psalm 118 is “extremely apposite” in connection with the temple cleansing and the Pharisees’ challenging of his authority (N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God, Volume II* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996] 497–501). See also Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 290; Evans, *Mark* 230.

⁸¹ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 105.

⁸² *Ibid.* 31.

teaches that the “son” must be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and subjected to contempt; his use of ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι and ἐξουθενθῆναι, respectively, tie to the verb “reject” in Ps 118:22.⁸³ In Luke 13:35, Jesus laments how Jerusalem has consistently killed its prophets, and he concludes with a self-referential, eschatologically-oriented quotation from Ps 118:26: “you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”⁸⁴

2. *The stone tradition and the turnover of the Kingdom.* Having established how the first-century audience would have understood Psalm 118 in general, a final question remains: how would Jesus’ hearers have understood the stone metaphor itself? Is there any evidence to indicate that a first century Jew would have a pre-understanding about the stone that coheres with the parable’s teaching, or is the stone quotation merely an apologetic device of later Christians?⁸⁵ Numerous strands of evidence affirm the former.

Beyond Ps 118:22, the metaphor of the stone appears in several places in Hebrew literature and, as most scholars agree, takes on a two-fold significance: for some, it is a stone of strength or upbuilding; for others, it is a stone of stumbling. It first emerges in Deut 32:4, 37 as a metaphor for Yahweh as the true God against the false gods of pagan nations⁸⁶—as, in other words, a demarcation between those who are the people of the true God and those who are not.⁸⁷ The metaphor stands at the center of two prophecies of Isaiah. In Isa 8:14, the prophet describes the dual nature of the stone in vivid terms.⁸⁸ With the Assyrian threat materializing, Israel can either find the stone to be a sanctuary, if they cling to Yahweh in faith, or a stumbling-stone, if they fall away.⁸⁹ Later in Isaiah 28, the prophet again draws

⁸³ Ibid. 103. The verb ἐξουθενθῆναι in Mark 9:12 is a more direct translation of the underlying Hebrew (דָּמָה), as reflected in how Acts 4:11 quotes Psalm 118:22: ὁ λίθος, ὁ ἐξουθενθησας ὑφ’ ὑμῶν τῶν οἰκοδόμων, ὁ γενόμενος εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας.

⁸⁴ Brunson, *Psalm 118* 112. The intertextual connections may go even further than 118:26; in the preceding verse 34, Luke writes, “the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it,” using a participial verb (λιθοβολούσα) that is built off the noun λίθος.

⁸⁵ There has been significant debate as to whether the stone-related verses formed a formal written or oral *testimonia* of OT apologetic texts disseminated in the early church or simply a broader stone interpretive “tradition.” In favor of the latter option is the important fact that in all significant NT passages where the stone texts are cited, the writers preface the quotations with standard scriptural introductory formulae, indicating they are drawing on the OT rather than some indefinite collection of testimonies or hymn texts: see II.4 above for the Synoptic accounts; Rom 9:30–33 uses καθὼς γέγραπται; 1 Pet 2:4–10 uses διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇν.

⁸⁶ “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge’ (ESV). The Hebrew noun in both cases is צור, which the LXX translates, interestingly, not as “stone” at all, but as Θεός and οἱ θεοὶ, respectively.

⁸⁷ Norman Hillyer, “Rock-Stone Imagery in 1 Peter,” *TynBul* 22 (1971) 58. Notably, he comments, “Stone as an Old Testament name for Yahweh prepared the way for the Messianic understanding” that developed later.

⁸⁸ Oswalt, *Isaiah* 517–18.

⁸⁹ The MT reads that God will become both a “sanctuary” (מְקִדָּשׁ) and a “stone of offense and a rock of stumbling” (לְצִבּוֹן וְלִפְתָּן וְלִצְוָר מְקִשּׁוֹל), using both the צִבּוֹן that is common with Ps 118:22 and צוֹר from Deut 32:4. The LXX reads, interestingly, that God will be a sanctuary and *not* a stone of stumbling, at least for those of faith (ἔσται σοι εἰς ἀγίασμα καὶ οὐχ ὡς λίθου προσκόμματος). In both MT and LXX, however, the subsequent verse predicts that “many shall stumble on it” (Isa 8:15).

upon the stone metaphor to indict Israel's leaders for failing to trust in Yahweh and, instead, entering into a "covenant of death" (28:15) with Egypt. They are not to rest in their own political maneuverings, for God has "laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation" (28:16a), echoing much of the language in Ps 118:22.⁹⁰ The Aramaic targum, notably, renders the verse not with "stone" at all, but with "King."⁹¹ In the second half of the verse, the MT simply reads **וְיִהְיֶה לֹא בְרַחֲמָיו** ("Whoever believes will not be in haste"; 28:16b). However, most codices of the LXX insert an important dative pronoun "in him," rendering the phrase **ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχυνοθή**.⁹² The fate of Israel rests, then, on the response of its leaders to the stone in Zion⁹³—the stone which, given the personification seen in the targums and the LXX, was "an accepted Messianic title among Jews and not merely a Christian view."⁹⁴ Later passages in Isaiah (31:9; 51:1) use stone imagery once again to describe Yahweh versus pagan gods.

In exilic and post-exilic prophetic literature, the stone shifts from being the impetus for Israel's stumbling through unbelief into exile, to an emblem of eschatological deliverance for God's people.⁹⁵ In Zech 3:9, the stone set before the priest bears an inscription relating to the forgiveness of Israel's sin; further, in 4:7 the stone becomes the headstone in the rebuilding of the future temple.⁹⁶ Zechariah later envisions God placing Zion itself as a "heavy stone" against which the nations will gather (Zech 12:3).⁹⁷ Daniel similarly portrays a stone being cut out, not by human hands, and used to destroy the pagan empires that subjugate God's people (Dan 2:34).⁹⁸ Furthermore, Qumran literature interprets the stone (partially quoting Isa 28:16) as referring to the unshakeable foundation of the purified, faithful, eschatological community which the covenanters believed they constituted.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ The MT uses both of the nouns that are present in Ps 118:22 for stone and corner: **בִּשְׂבִיב** and **בְּאֵיב** (see note 43 above). For cornerstone, the LXX of Isa 28:16 uses ἀκρογωνίαῖον, which differs from κεφαλὴν γωνίας used in Ps 118:22 but carries the same meaning (BDAG 39, 209, 541).

⁹¹ "Behold, I appoint a King in Zion; a King mighty, powerful, and terrible" (Pauli, *Chaldee Paraphrase* 89).

⁹² For κατασχύνω BDAG 517 lists "disappointment that come to one whose faith ... is shown to be vain," which differs from the underlying Hebrew "be in haste" (BDB 301); however, Hillyer notes that by metonymy the meanings are quite close, with haste standing for stumbling ("Rock-Stone Imagery" 64).

⁹³ Oswalt, *Isaiah* 518. See also Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (K&D 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 8–13.

⁹⁴ Hillyer, "Rock-Stone Imagery" 59.

⁹⁵ See Wright's summary of the Zechariah and Daniel passages in *Jesus and the Victory of God* 499–501.

⁹⁶ Hillyer, "Rock-Stone Imagery" 65.

⁹⁷ The LXX (θήσομαι τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ λίθον καταπατούμενον πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσι) uses a form of τίθημι, which Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:6 use instead of ἐμβάλλω when quoting Isa 28:16 (LXX), indicating further connections.

⁹⁸ Note that in all four verses (Zech 3:9, 4:7, 12:3; Dan 2:34), the MT consistently uses **בִּשְׂבִיב** for "stone."

⁹⁹ The Community Rule (1QS) 8.5–9 reads, "The Community council shall be founded on truth, like an everlasting plantation, a holy house for Israel ... It (the Community) will be the tested rampart, the precious cornerstone that does not [blank] whose foundations do not shake or tremble" (Florentino

Considering the trajectory of the stone-related passages in both the OT and intertestamental literature, it is clear that first century Jews would have been quite familiar with the stone metaphor and its two-fold nature. Numerous associations would have come to mind. Who is the stone? It begins in the OT as Yahweh himself,¹⁰⁰ but it later develops through the canonical prophetic writings, the targums, the LXX, and Qumran literature into a messianic or kingly figure. How does the stone function? In all cases, the stone is related in some way to the upbuilding (cornerstone, headstone) of the people of God through faith, or to the destruction (stumbling-stone, crushing) of unbelievers. Most importantly, who can stumble over the stone through rejection and unbelief? The OT witnesses are clear and consistent: not only can the enemies of God fall upon the stone, but also his very own people of Israel. To the first-century Jew, the stone metaphor issues an open-ended challenge: it is the cornerstone for those who believe, but the stumbling-stone for those who do not, whether Jew or Gentile.¹⁰¹

In other words, the interpretation of the stone as some sort of messianic figure who divides God's true people from the unbelievers is no later invention by the early church, but rather forms the very warp and woof of the interpretive expectations of the Second Temple Jewish leaders in Jesus' audience. In fact, without this background understanding, Jesus' use of the Ps 118:22 quotation in the parable would be puzzling. In its original setting, the leaders of Israel accept the kingly figure, but the enemy nations have rejected him; God delivers this "stone" from these enemies and reconstitutes him as the "cornerstone" of the people of God.¹⁰² Yet in this parable the opposite is happening: the leaders of Israel (the tenants in charge of the vineyard) consistently reject God's messengers to them, and the vineyard is given to others.¹⁰³ Jesus can make this reversal only because, to his hearers, this is simply how the stone always functions in the antecedent literary tradition: even God's own people will stumble on the stone if they reject it, but this same stone can be the cornerstone for a different people who believe.

Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996] 12). See also Hillyer, "Rock-Stone Imagery" 70–71.

¹⁰⁰ Oswalt also notes that the Isa 28:16 "stone" could refer, as an intermediate step, to the Torah, the rebuilt temple, the covenant, the Davidic king, mount Zion, the remnant, or faith itself (Oswalt, *Isaiah* 518).

¹⁰¹ This is, in fact, precisely how these very same stone passages—Isa 8:14, Isa 28:16, and Ps 118:22—are used elsewhere in the NT: (1) Peter's indictment of the Jewish leaders for rejecting Christ (Acts 4:11); (2) Paul's pointed case regarding the disobedience and hardening of empirical Israel and the ingrafting of the believing Gentiles in Rom 9:30–33; and (3) 1 Peter's description of the building of new Israel among the Gentiles after the rejection of disobedient Israel in 1 Pet 2:4–10. See also the *Barnabas* 6:2–4 for similar early Christian usage.

¹⁰² Brunson, *Psalms* 118 45; Allen, *Psalms* 124–25.

¹⁰³ See interpretive summaries in Hagner, *Matthew* 625; Evans, *Mark* 239; and Nolland, *Luke* 955.

IV. FIRST- AND SECOND-CENTURY CONTEXT:
RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS OF PARABOLIC TEACHING

Having established that the literary heritage and background understanding of Jesus' hearing audience would have provided numerous angles along which the Ps 118:22 quotation would drive home the parable, it is important to probe a final dimension of the Wicked Tenants pericope: its fit within the rhetorical context of Jewish parabolic teaching at the time.

1. *Mashal and nimshal*. Many scholars have noted that this parable falls in the category of juridical parables, which are "intended to provoke spontaneous judgments by the hearers ... eliciting self-condemnation."¹⁰⁴ This type of parable—which has OT precedents in Nathan (2 Sam 12:1–7), the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:1–20), the son of the prophet (1 Kgs 20:34–42), and the Isaiah 5 vineyard poem itself¹⁰⁵—became common in first- and second-century rabbinic teaching.¹⁰⁶ A central feature of juridical parables (and other forms) is the interplay between the body of the parable, which is referred to as the *mashal*,¹⁰⁷ and the concluding statement or quotation, called the *nimshal*. The traditional view is that the *nimshal* functions as the explanatory key to the *mashal*, elucidating its meaning that is otherwise veiled.¹⁰⁸

While one must be cautious to avoid an inappropriate imposition of later rabbinic teachings onto the early first century context of Jesus' ministry, many scholars argue persuasively that Jesus' quotation of Ps 118:22 at the end of the parable is in fact functioning as an early form of *nimshal*.¹⁰⁹ This is notable given Jesus' stated intent regarding how his parables both conceal and reveal (Mark 4:10–12). In the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, as with many others, the Jewish authorities in Jesus' audience are not initially able to understand Jesus' point. The goal of eliciting their self-condemnation with the *mashal* narrative alone simply falls short because the true meaning is concealed behind the parabolic form. However, when Jesus takes upon his lips the stone quotation, which is laden with significant meaning for his audience, this *nimshal* "confirms the rhetorical message" by directing the parable back on the audience.¹¹⁰ It is only after the quotation that the audience "perceived that he had told the parable against them" (Mark 12:12 // Matt 21:45 // Luke

¹⁰⁴ Snodgrass, "Recent Research" 121.

¹⁰⁵ See comparison between Isaiah 5 and Nathan's parable in Oswalt, *Isaiah* 151.

¹⁰⁶ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 276, 297.

¹⁰⁷ The *mashal* (from Heb. מִשָּׁל) is "an allusive narrative told for an ulterior purpose" (Daniel Boyarin, "Midrash in Parables," *AJS Review* 20/1 [1995] 124). See the discussion on parable genres and *mashal* in Timothy Polk, "Paradigms, Parables, and *Mesalim*: On Reading the *Masal* in Scripture," *CBQ* 45 (1983) 564–83.

¹⁰⁸ Snodgrass, "Recent Research" 203. For example, Nathan's parable does not sink home and produce the intended self-condemnation with David until Nathan says, "You are the man!" (the *nimshal*).

¹⁰⁹ Collins, *Mark* 547–48; he notes that it "may be one of the earliest testimonies to the inherently rhetorical use of scriptural exegesis in a narrative parable" (p. 548). See also Kimball, "Jesus' Exposition" 91.

¹¹⁰ Collins, *Mark* 547.

20:19; see III.3).¹¹¹ This is notable because *mashal* parables do not travel without their *nimshal* counterparts—the *nimshal* is the lynchpin of the *mashal* and is key to its interpretation.¹¹² In other words, if it is true that Jesus is using the form of a juridical parable to elicit a response from the Jewish leaders, then the originality of stone quotation is rendered necessary, for the *mashal* is incomplete without it.¹¹³

2. *Nimshal and mashal*. This standard understanding of the relationship between the *mashal* and *nimshal* holds that the *mashal* is primary and the *nimshal* is secondary (but necessary); in other words, the logical arrow points *mashal* → *nimshal*. One might ask, however, whether the arrow may point the opposite direction: *mashal* ← *nimshal*. Recent scholarship has shown that in rabbinic literature, the *nimshal* is actually the real story, not the *mashal*. The Scripture quotation or statement in the *nimshal* is actually what the speaker is attempting to teach, and the *mashal* serves as the narrative or exegetical elaboration of that teaching.¹¹⁴ In other words, “by citing the biblical verse, the *nimshal* provides the reason for the parable.”¹¹⁵ How would such a shift in perspective shine new light on the interpretation of this parable? Jesus’ main purpose would be to announce the fulfillment of Ps 118:22 in their hearing (as he often does with OT passages). He is that stumbling stone of Isa 8:14; he is that cornerstone of Isa 28:16. He is the stone that the builders have rejected—but the enemies over whom the Davidic stone triumphs in Ps 118:22 are no longer pagan oppressors, but Israel’s leaders themselves. Those who should have accepted the stone have cast him out, so he will become the cornerstone of a new people of God, “a people producing its fruits” (Matt 21:43). That is the fulfillment of Ps 118:22, the *nimshal*. But what does this rejection look like? How has it worked out in history? Jesus demonstrates this through the parabolic *mashal*: God set apart Israel as his precious vineyard and entrusted it to its leaders; he sent messengers to them time and time again, but each one was cast out due to the leaders’ hardness; finally, he sent his son, but they stumbled over him as well. Thus, the vineyard will be given to a different people; the Pharisees and scribes who reject the stone stand condemned.¹¹⁶ This reading of the parable elucidates fully the stone imagery as the audience would have understood it: the son-stone has *always* functioned as the cornerstone for the faithful remnant and the stumbling or rejected stone for unbeliev-

¹¹¹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 290: “How do the hearers suddenly discern that the parable is about them? ... No Jewish listener would identify himself or herself with the tenants *Not until the stone quotation is the impact of the parable made clear*” (emphasis original).

¹¹² Boyarin, “Midrash in Parables” 127–28.

¹¹³ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* 290–91: the parable “needs the quotation ... it is key to understanding the parable.”

¹¹⁴ Boyarin, “Midrash in Parables” 128–30. Stern and Neusner have been leading proponents of this reinterpretation of the primacy of the *nimshal* over the *mashal* (Gary G. Porton, “The Parable in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Historical Jesus in Context* [ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison Jr., and John Dominic Crossan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006] 208).

¹¹⁵ Porton, “Parable in the Hebrew Bible” 208. Boyarin elaborates, the “*nimshal* is ontologically primary ... in the sense that [it] represents the biblical narrative for which the *mashal* is the interpreting text” (“Midrash in Parables” 129).

¹¹⁶ Kimball, “Jesus’ Exposition” 90.

ers. Put differently, “the stone says with scriptural authority what the parable says” by illustration.¹¹⁷

V. CONCLUSIONS

The numerous threads of evidence surveyed render implausible the standard assumption that the Ps 118:22 quotation in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants is a secondary accretion or artifice of the early church. The approach used for this particular case illustrates the importance of employing a method that seeks to integrate three key strands of evidence. The exegetical data is significantly in favor of the natural and, thus, authentic relationship of the stone text to the parable: the Isaiah 5 framework of the fruitless vineyard of Israel, the “son-stone” wordplay surrounding the central figure of the parable, the role of the stone quotation as the hinge of the narrative structure, and Jesus’ actual usage of the OT text. The antecedent literary tradition presents a strong case that Jesus’ contemporary audience carries significant preconceptions regarding both Psalm 118 and the “stone” metaphor that both precede any later Christian usage and guide their understanding of how Jesus uses the text in relation to the various elements of his parable. While these two strands of biblical data are the most determinative, additional corroboration may be found through a nuanced understanding of Jesus’ rhetorical approach as an early form of juridical *mashal* parable within his first-century context.

¹¹⁷ Snodgrass, “Recent Research” 204.