

REGENT COLLEGE

**ECHOES OF ISAIAH 28 IN MARK 12:1–12:  
A HYMN OF PRAISE SUNG IN A MINOR KEY**

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED BY

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On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. rises to a podium on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. Transforming the podium into a pulpit, he delivers one of the most famous speeches of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of what is more sermon than speech, he quotes a well known American Hymn: *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. In so doing, he takes up its meaning for his own purposes, renewing its vision, while simultaneously using its words to challenge all those who fail to embody it.<sup>2</sup>

This iconic moment in modern history provides an imaginative framework for understanding what takes place in the Temple courts near the time of Passover in Mark 12:1-12. Jesus evokes Isaianic imagery as he tells a parable about the corrupt tenants of a vineyard. Then using words from a well-known Jewish hymn, he defines who he is while pronouncing an Isaiah-like judgement on those who reject him. This paper asserts that the judgement pronounced in Isaiah 28 echoes behind Jesus' use of Psalm 118:22-23 in Mark 12:1-12. Hearing this echo behind the text should evoke the entire context of Isa. 28 as an interpretive backdrop. Careful application of the methodology outlined below shows that this reading is reasonable and provides new interpretive horizons for this section of Mark's Gospel.

### *Orientation to the Pericope*

Mark 12:1-12 is situated in the first half of Jesus' confrontation with Jerusalem's leadership in the Temple (11:1-13:37). Controversy between Jesus and these authorities is building from the earliest scenes of Mark's narrative (1:22; 2:8, 16, 18, 24; 3:6). This dynamic further develops key narrative themes established in the prologue. The compound citation from

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, *I Have a Dream - 40th Anniversary Edition: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World* (HarperOne, 1992); 101-106.

<sup>2</sup> Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* (University of Georgia Press, 1998); 24.

Isaiah, Exodus, and Malachi (Mk 1:2-3) announces the good news of Jesus Christ as carrying with it two themes: redemption *and* judgement. As Rikki Watts argues, Isaiah's "long-awaited coming of Yahweh... has begun, and with it, the inauguration of Israel's eschatological comfort." But this hope comes with a warning. Watts continues, "a right response to John as Malachi's Elijah is imperative if the nation is to avoid the spectre of Yahweh's purging judgement which hangs over Jerusalem's *raison d'être* (reason for being), the Temple."<sup>3</sup>

Though crowds sing lines from Ps. 118, Jesus' procession into Jerusalem turns out to be an "a-triumphal entry" as the leaders of the temple fail to receive him (11:1-11).<sup>4</sup> After this, Mark begins a "triple intercalation" that connects five units of narrative that are meant to be "mutually interpreted" (11:12 - 12:1-12):<sup>5</sup>

- i Jesus curses the fig tree (11:12-14)
- ii Jesus overturns tables in the temple (11:15-18)
- iii Jesus explains the cursing of the fig tree to his disciples (11:19-26)
- iv The chief priests, scribes, and elders question Jesus' authority (11:27-33)
- v Jesus responds to this challenge with a parable (12:1-12)

While this paper focuses its attention on the last of these five units, it does so assuming that the themes and structures of Mark's narrative must accompany any attempt to understand the text.

In Mk 12:1-12, Jesus tells a parable about a man who planted a vineyard and leased it to tenants (v.1). These tenants refused to deliver the agreed share of the produce to the man who planted the vineyard. Instead, in successive rounds of escalating violence, they beat, shame, and kill the man's servants who are sent to collect (vv. 2-5). Finally, the man sends his "beloved son,"

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<sup>3</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Baker Academic, 2000); 90.

<sup>4</sup> Brent Kinman, "Parousia, Jesus' 'a-Triumphal' Entry, and the Fate of Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 no 2, (1999); 279-294.

<sup>5</sup> George H. Guthrie, "The Tree and the Temple: Echoes of a New Ingathering and Renewed Exile (Mark 11.12–21)," *New Testament Studies* 68, no. 1 (2022); 30.

assuming, "they will respect my son" (v. 6). But the tenants see the opportunity to inherit the vineyard for themselves.<sup>6</sup> They seize the son, kill him, and cast him out of the vineyard (vv. 7-8). Jesus then asks what the *κύριος* (owner/lord) of the vineyard ought to do. Answering his own question, Jesus says, "he will destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others" (v. 9). Finally in vv. 10-11, moving from agricultural to architectural imagery, Jesus quotes Ps. 118:22-23. He asks if they had heard the scripture:

The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes.<sup>7</sup>

The narrator reveals that upon hearing this, the chief priests, scribes, and elders realize that Jesus was talking about them, and "wanted to arrest him." But their fear of the crowd keep them from doing so, and they leave (v.12).

Interpreters find much to disagree about in this pericope. However, in the broadest sense, there is consensus that Jesus' parable pronounces Yahweh's judgement upon Jerusalem's leaders and that his use of Ps. 118 is to be read as an affirmation of his messianic identity and vindication. The proposal that Isa. 28 is echoing behind this text is not aimed at refuting these broad understandings. Rather, the proposed echo, if deemed reasonable, will serve to enhance our understanding. The result will be the addition of texture and vibrancy. The goal is to illuminate what may not always be seen, not to change the picture altogether.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark* (Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007); 404.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 12:10–11 NRSV.

## *Methodology*

In determining whether it is reasonable to hear Isa. 28 echoing behind Mk 12:1-12, this paper deploys Richard Hays' seven tests for hearing echoes.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to Mark, the *availability* and *recurrence* of Isaiah are quite clear. Mark's intricate use of Isaiah has been convincingly argued in recent scholarship.<sup>9</sup> One can safely assume that Mark has Isaiah *available* to him. Next, Mark's use of Isaiah is *recurrent* and wide ranging. The evangelist quotes or alludes to texts that range from Isaiah chapters 5-66.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore not outrageous to assume that Mark had, as R. Watts argues, the entire framework of Isaiah operating beneath his narrative.<sup>11</sup> Echoes are possible from across Isaiah and should not be at all surprising to interpreters. Still, *availability* and *recurrence* do not, on their own, prove the reasonability of an Isa. 28 echo in this text.

This paper proceeds by considering Hays' remaining tests in three stages. First, a discussion of the *history of interpretation* shows that certain hermeneutical concerns and exegetical questions tend to dominate the conversation. This drowns out the earliest interpreters' understanding of the stone imagery evoked in Jesus' quotation of Ps. 118. Second, discerning the *volume* of Isa. 28 in this text reveals that despite low lexical correspondence, the words the texts do share carry high amounts of "rhetorical stress."<sup>12</sup> The importance of these words will be

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<sup>8</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press, 1989); 29-33.

<sup>9</sup> The UBS lists 5 quotations of Isaiah in Mark, three are nearly verbatim from the Old Greek (OG): 7.6-7 (cf. Isa. 29.13), 11.17 (cf. Isa. 56.7), and 12.32 (cf. 45.21). For Mark's use of Isaiah see: Gregory K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007); Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*; Ben Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Fortress Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> See

<sup>11</sup> See, Watts in Beale and Carson, *New Testament Use of the Old*.

<sup>12</sup> See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*: 30. re: rhetorical stress.

corroborated by their appearances across the NT. This evidence, together with the mode in which Jesus may be teaching, will contribute to the *historical plausibility* of such an echo. Third, testing the *thematic coherence* of the proposed reading demonstrates how Isa. 28 fits well within this section of Mark's narrative and provides a more *satisfying* explanation of Jesus' use of Ps 118 in this context.

### *History of Interpretation*

In-depth discussions of Mk 12:1-12 are bound to engage questions about whether or not to read the parable allegorically, and which parts of the passage (if any) are authentic to Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Many recent scholars are returning to the view that this text ought to be read allegorically and as original to Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Such readings assume that parables carry deeper meaning(s), while remaining rooted in real-world contexts where their meaning(s) find purchase. Scholars also debate the source of the quotation of Ps. 118. Some argue that it was spoken by Jesus and belongs with the parable,<sup>15</sup> while others conclude that it was a later addition meant to affirm Christ's vindication.<sup>16</sup> This paper assumes the parable and quotation to be authentic to Jesus and contains layers of meaning that speak about the scene's past, present, and future.

After deciding how to approach the passage, interpreters must determine what the scene's key characters represent. Many scholars see the owner as Yahweh, the vineyard as "Israel in

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<sup>13</sup> See a helpful chart in Culpepper, *Mark*: 400.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Black, "The Parables as Allegory," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 42, no. 2 (1960): 273-287.

<sup>15</sup> K. R. Snodgrass, "Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants : An Assessment," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8, (1998): 187-215.

<sup>16</sup> Morna Dorothy Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark* (A&C Black, 1991); 277.

miniature,"<sup>17</sup> and Israel's prophets (especially John) as the servants.<sup>18</sup> However, debates rage over the proper understanding of the "tenants," the "others," and the "stone." Some conclude that the tenants are Jerusalem's leaders who are being addressed by Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Kelly R. Iverson offers a helpful insight that calls for a more expansive view of the tenants. Iverson writes, "the parable addresses the chief priests, scribes, and elders, but it also foreshadows the crowd's turn against Jesus."<sup>20</sup> Scholars then identify the "others" as the Nations/Gentiles, the disciples and apostles, or a combined group of Jews and Gentiles who follow Jesus as a "restored remnant."<sup>21</sup> The current study agrees that an expansive view of tenants is preferable, and that "others" refers to a group of Jews and Gentiles who choose to trust in this strange new stone.

Some scholars insist that the stone is a foundation stone that forms the base of a building upon which everything else stands.<sup>22</sup> Others propose that the stone refers to a capstone or an ornamental top-stone that serves as the final, completing component of a building.<sup>23</sup> Scholars tend to take a position but are careful to say that whatever kind of stone it is, it is the most important stone in the building.<sup>24</sup> What stands out in the literature is the means by which scholars go about deciding where to land. They survey scripture for stone imagery, seeking to sharpen

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<sup>17</sup> Many scholars detect allusions to Isaiah 5 in Mk 12. George J Brooke, "4q500 1 and the Use of Scripture in the Parable of the Vineyard," *Dead Sea Discoveries* (1995); 268-294.

<sup>18</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Mark* (IVP Academic, 2008); 264-265.

<sup>19</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*. (Fortress Press, 2007); 545.

<sup>20</sup> She also suggests that some among those leaders who come to Jesus in the scenes that follow ought to be considered tenants as well. See, K. R. Iverson, "Jews, Gentiles, and the Kingdom of God : The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Narrative Perspective (Mark 12:1-12)," *Biblical Interpretation* 20, no. 3 (2012); 318-319.

<sup>21</sup> Strauss warns against interpreter's use of this passage to justify anti-semitism. Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (Zondervan, 2014); 520.

<sup>22</sup> Collins, *Mark*: 548.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Cahill, "Not a Cornerstone!: Translating Ps 118, 22 in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *Revue biblique* 106, no. 3 (1999); 356-357.

<sup>24</sup> Strauss, *Mark*: 517.

their semantic understanding by comparing individual verses. The broader context in which each verse is situated is often left under-explored. Isa. 8:14 may be an exception, based on its inclusion in the same scenes in the other synoptic gospels. Yet, despite the increased attention, the majority of exploration between texts seems to amount to lexical cross-referencing. There is more to explore.

As mentioned above, there is discernible, though rough, consensus on the basic meaning of Mark 12:1-12: Jesus delivers a parable of judgement on the leaders in Jerusalem, accentuating his point with two lines from a hymn of praise that identifies him as the "chief cornerstone." Although consensus is found, the under-utilization of metalepsis in examining corresponding stone passages like Isa 28:16 warrants fresh inquiry.<sup>25</sup>

### *Volume and Historical Plausibility*

Testing an echo of Isa. 28 requires attending to any allusions to Isaiah in Mk 12:1-9. Doing so will tune the ear to hear Mark's allusion to texts that come from later sections of Isaiah, which are themselves developing themes that begin in Isa 5. The volume of Isa. 5 in Mk 12 is attested by many scholars. Craig A. Evans comprehensively charts the lexical correspondence between Isa. 5:1-7 and Mk 12:1-9.<sup>26</sup> He identifies eight points of correspondence between the texts:

#### *Mark 12:1-9 Correspondence with Isaiah 5:1-7*

| Word/Phrase | Mark 12 | Isa. 5 - MT | Isa. 5 - OG |
|-------------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| vineyard    | v. 1    |             | vv. 1-2     |
| planted     | v. 1    |             | v. 2        |

<sup>25</sup> i.e. 1 Peter 2:4-6

<sup>26</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Mark: 8:27-16:20. B.* (Thomas Nelson, 2001); 225.



|                                 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| fence                           | v. 1 | v. 5    | v. 2  |
| hewed out vat                   | v. 1 | v. 2    |       |
| built tower                     | v. 1 | v. 2    |       |
| Let us Kill / Bloodshed         | v. 7 | v. 7    |       |
| What will owner / I do          | v. 9 | v. 5    | v. 4  |
| destroy / devour / made a waste | v. 9 | vv. 5-6 | - - - |

Evans clearly demonstrates the lexical consistency between Isa. 5 and Jesus' parable. He adds that the Aramaic translation of Isaiah and other 2nd temple Jewish writings<sup>27</sup> also attest to Israel seeing herself as Yahweh's vineyard.<sup>28</sup> The volume and historical plausibility of this allusion, along with the particular form of teaching deployed, calls the interpreter to consider the entire context of Isaiah 5 as they observe Jesus issuing a juridicial parable.<sup>29</sup>

Here however, Jesus answers his own question and proceeds to quote Ps. 118:22-23 (which is Ps. 117 in the OG and will be referred to as such whenever referring to the Greek version hereafter). The text provided in vv. 10-11 is quoted verbatim from the OG. There is no mistaking the intentionality and care with which Mark quotes from this important piece of Jewish liturgy. The Hallel Psalms (Ps. 115-118 MT)<sup>30</sup> were likely sung antiphonally as many as 21 times each year as part of the feasts of Tabernacles, Passover,<sup>31</sup> Pentecost, and Dedication.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Moor demonstrates this in detail. Johannes C. Moor, "The Targumic Background of Mark 12:1-12: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 29, no. 1 (1998): 63-80.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, *Mark: B.* 226-229.

<sup>29</sup> "A parable delivered as a third party case where the audience renders judgment and then are exposed to the reality that they are the perpetrators of the crime and so have judged themselves." David Witthoff, ed., *The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary* (Lexham Press, 2014). As in the case of King David (2 Sam. 12).

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress Press, 1992); 241.

<sup>31</sup> This is thought to be the hymn sung after the Passover meal in Mark 14, which would have been particularly charged after Jesus' use of it here. Andrew C. Brunson, *Psalms 118 in the Gospel of John: An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John* (Mohr Siebeck, 2003); 111.

<sup>32</sup> Brunson, *Psalms 118*: 82.

This means that most Jews would have known this psalm by heart.<sup>33</sup> But does this text mark the conceptual boundaries that Jesus had in mind when he used it to accentuate the point of a parable that alludes so clearly to Isaiah 5?

In a recent book that will be essential for these kinds of studies, Gary Schnittjer says that Ps. 118:22 may be drawing on images from Isa. 28:16.<sup>34</sup> To determine the degree of correspondence between the texts of Isa. 28 and this important piece of Jewish worship, an examination of how both texts were translated from Hebrew to Greek is necessary.

*Psalm 118:22 (117:22 OG)*

| MT                                                                                        | OG                                                                                                    | NRSV                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>אֶבֶן מְאֹסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים הַיְתֵה<br/>לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה<sup>35</sup></p>                  | <p>λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ<br/>οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη<br/>εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας.<sup>36</sup></p> | <p>The <b>stone</b> that the builders<br/>rejected has become the <b>chief<br/>cornerstone</b>.<sup>37</sup></p>                                                              |
| <p>אֶבֶן = stone<br/>לְרֹאשׁ = head, top, chief<br/>פִּנָּה = corner (of house, roof)</p> | <p>λίθον = stone<br/>κεφαλὴν = head<br/>γωνίας = angle, corner</p>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This greek translation is considered quiet formal.<sup>38</sup></li> <li>• פִּנָּה &amp; γωνίας are used ~ 30x in the OT.</li> </ul> |

Interpreters should note the relatively clean correspondence between words which are not exceedingly rare either Hebrew or Greek. It is well-noted that Jews considered the "builders" to be religious leaders, and the "cornerstone" to be the Davidic king once rejected but now vindicated.<sup>39</sup> This context must be retained as this verse's connection to Isa. 28:16 is considered.

<sup>33</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Schnittjer rates this correspondence as "possible," reading Ps. 118 as a receptor text based on "the many scriptural traditions that appear" in it. Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-By-book Guide* (Zondervan Academic, 2020); 525.

<sup>35</sup> Psalm 118:22 BHS.

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 117:22 LXX Swete.

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 118:22 NRSV.

<sup>38</sup> Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 9-16: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor University Press, 2014); 114.

<sup>39</sup> Beale and Carson, *New Testament Use of the Old*: 183. Targum 118:22 attests to this understanding: "The boy

## Isaiah 28:16

| MT                                                                                                                                | OG                                                                                                                                                                                         | NRSV                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>הַנְּנִי יִסֵּד בְּצִיּוֹן אֶבֶן אֶבֶן בְּחֵן<br/> פְּנֵת יְקָרָת מוֹסֵד מוֹסֵד<br/> הַמֵּאֲמִין לֹא יִחְיֵשׁ<sup>40</sup></p> | <p>Ἴδου ἐγὼ ἐμβάλλω εἰς τὰ<br/> θεμέλια Σειῶν λίθον πολυτελεῖ<br/> ἐκλεκτὸν ἀκρογωνιαῖον<br/> ἔντιμον, εἰς τὰ θεμέλια αὐτῆς,<br/> καὶ ὁ πιστεύων οὐ μὴ<br/> καταισχυνηθῆ.<sup>41</sup></p> | <p>See, I am laying in Zion a<br/> foundation stone, a tested stone,<br/> a precious cornerstone, a sure<br/> foundation: "One who trusts<br/> will not panic."<sup>42</sup></p> |
| <p>אֶבֶן = stone</p>                                                                                                              | <p>λίθον = stone</p>                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>-----</p>                                                                                                                      | <p>ἄκρο = high point, top</p>                                                                                                                                                              | <p><i>Note the lack of a clear<br/> corresponding word for ἄκρο<br/> in the MT.</i></p>                                                                                          |
| <p>פְּנֵה = corner (of house,<br/> roof)</p>                                                                                      | <p>γωνίας = angle, corner</p>                                                                                                                                                              | <p>ἀκρογωνιαῖον occurs 1x in the OG.</p>                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>בְּחֵן = testing</p>                                                                                                           | <p>ἐκλεκτὸν = Picked out</p>                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>יְקָרָת = precious, rare</p>                                                                                                   | <p>πολυτελεῖ = Expensive<br/> ἔντιμον = Honored, noble</p>                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                  |

The point of the passage where this verse is found is the judgement of Judah's leaders who have made "a covenant with Sheol" and have refused to heed the warning of Yahweh's prophet (Isa. 28). Rendering this particular verse in Greek is complicated by the construction of the Hebrew phrase describing the stone being laid in Zion. Isaiah loads this stone with poetic imagery and emphasis, both semantically and structurally. Isa. 28:14-18 forms a chiasm that centers on v. 16b, "One who trusts will not panic." The object of what is to be "trust[ed]" is this most "precious cornerstone," which is further defined by it's chiastic pair in v.17a as having

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which the builders abandoned was among the sons of Jesse, and he is worthy to be appointed king and ruler."

<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 28:16 BHS.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 28:16 LXX Swete.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 28:16 NRSV.

"justice" and "righteousness."<sup>43</sup> It stands to reason that the emphatic words (cornerstone, justice, and righteousness) used to describe the structural focal point of this text carry significant rhetorical stress.

In comparing the stones in Ps. 117:22 and Isa. 28:16 OG, a key difference is observed: κεφαλὴν γωνίας (Ps 117:22) v. ἀκρογωνιαῖον (Isa. 28:16). This difference does not prove a lack of correspondence. The words κεφαλὴν and ἀκρο are very similar in meaning. And it is important to note that this is the only time where ἀκρογωνιαῖον is used in the OG.<sup>44</sup> While the appearance of this rare word may simply be the translator's best effort to render a complicated poetic Hebrew phrase, it could also be their own attempt at poetic emphasis. It is conceivable that they chose an exceedingly rare word, to name the exceedingly rare stone in Isa. 28:16. Regardless, a number of scholars point to this connection between Ps. 118:22 and Isa. 28:16.<sup>45</sup> Having established the words with the most rhetorical stress in this part of Isa 28, the task turns to identifying thematic coherence.

But first, is it historically plausible that Jesus (and Mark's) audience would have heard a passage with such sharp judgement echoing behind the lines of a famous Psalm of praise? The Tosefta describes the corruption and violence present among the final generations of Jerusalem's leadership before the destruction of the Temple.<sup>46</sup> Considered alongside the common understanding of Isaiah's vineyard during the 2nd Temple period and the reaction of the leaders

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<sup>43</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press, 2008); 14.

<sup>44</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2000); 39–40.

<sup>45</sup> Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 90-150* Kregel Academic & Professional, 2015); 453; John Goldingay, *Psalms: Psalms 90-150* Baker Academic, 2008); 353-366.

<sup>46</sup> Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (InterVarsity Press, 2002); 482. i.e.: “Menachot,” *Tosefta*, [https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta\\_Menachot.13.4](https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Menachot.13.4).

in the text itself (Mk 12:12), it can be assumed that the audience[s] registered the judgement behind Jesus' words. Yet, this does not, by itself, lead to the conclusion that Isa. 28 would have been specifically evoked by a mention of Ps. 118:22 in this context. Turning to New Testament authors as early interpreters provides clarity.

*1 Peter 2:6-8 quotes Isa. 28:16, Ps. 117:22, and Isa. 8:14 in succession:*

| NRSV                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | UBS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>"See, I am laying in Zion a <b>stone</b>,<br/>a <b>cornerstone</b> chosen and precious;<br/>and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."<br/>To you then who believe, he is precious;<br/>but for those who do not believe,<br/>"The <b>stone</b> that the builders rejected<br/>has become the very <b>head of the corner</b>,"<br/>and<br/>"A <b>stone</b> that makes them stumble,<br/>and a rock that makes them fall."<sup>47</sup></p> | <p>Ἴδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών <b>λίθον</b><br/><b>ἀκρογωνιάον</b> ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον,<br/>καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῆ.<br/>ὕμιν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν,<br/>ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ<br/><b>λίθος</b> ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες,<br/>οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς <b>κεφαλὴν γωνίας</b><br/>καὶ<br/><b>λίθος</b> προσκόμματος<br/>καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου.<sup>48</sup></p> |

Peter uses all three citations, maintaining their different words for stone, to describe the hope available to those who trust in the stone (Christ), as well as the peril for those who do not. If Peter, according to tradition, influences Mark's Gospel,<sup>49</sup> then his use of these verses as they appear further strengthens the reasonability of an Isa. 28 echo in Mk 12:1-12. From these data, a search for thematic coherence can commence.

### *Thematic Coherence & Satisfaction*

If evoked by the allusions to Isa. 5 and Jesus' quotation of Ps. 118:22, the context and themes of Isa. 28 cohere well with Mark's narrative. Ironically, coherence is found in Jesus'

<sup>47</sup> 1 Peter 2:6–8 NRSV.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Peter 2:6–8 UBS.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Baker Academic, 2022); 69-77.

choice to avoid the use of Isa. 28:16 to accentuate his parable. Two observations can be made in this regard. First, each of the four times Mark specifies that Jesus is speaking in parables, he does so in close proximity to confrontations with leaders from Jerusalem (Mk 3:20-30; 4:1-20; 7:1-23; 12:1-12). Second, amidst each of these encounters, there are direct citations from and clear allusions to Isaiah:

| Use of Isaiah near stated parables in Mark       | Reference in Isaiah                                |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Mk 3:27 - <i>Beelzebul controversy</i>           | Isa. 49:24; 53:12 - <i>Allusions</i> <sup>50</sup> |
| Mk 4:11-12 - <i>Parables are for "outsiders"</i> | Isa. 6:9-10 - <i>Quotation</i>                     |
| Mk 7:6-7 - <i>Conflict over purity law</i>       | Isa. 29:13 - <i>Quotation</i>                      |
| Mk 12:1-9 - <i>Conflict in Temple</i>            | Isa. 5:1-7 - <i>Allusions</i>                      |

Mark 4:11-12 sets readers up to understand Jesus' audience in the Temple as outsiders who do not hear. Mark 7:6-7 makes explicit Jesus' critique of the hypocritical worship of Jerusalem's leaders. Therefore, it should not surprise readers to hear Jesus obscure his speech in a direct conflict with Jerusalem's leaders by utilizing a line from a famous Hymn that was in their liturgy and on their lips that very week.<sup>51</sup> Considering this, the notion that Jesus would speak so directly and not have something echoing in the background, may need defending.

The possibility that Jesus is *co-evoking* contexts of restoration and judgement coheres with the themes begun in Mark's prologue (1:2-3). Yahweh's longed-for rescue has arrived in Zion (literally in 11:1-11). For those who receive him, the Hallelujahs of Ps. 118 is theirs. For any who reject him, theirs are the judgement woes of Isa. 28. The ways in which the judgement context of Isa. 28 coheres with the context of Mark 12 are striking.

First, agricultural imagery abounds. After another song about a vineyard and its coming judgement (Isa. 27:2-6), Isa 28:1-7 speaks of fading flowers (v. 1), early figs being stolen (v. 4)

<sup>50</sup> Beale and Carson, *New Testament Use of the Old*: 63.

<sup>51</sup> Brunson, *Psalms 118*: 63-82.

and the leaders' over-indulgence in the produce of the vineyard (v.7).<sup>52</sup> Scholars commonly hear the allusions to Isa. 5:1-7 in the beginning of Isa. 28, concluding that this is the judgement pronounced in Isa. 5 (cf. Mk 12:1-9).<sup>53</sup> With all this imagery and allusion to Isa. 5 from within Isa. 27-28, the key words from Isa. 28:16-17 find increasing significance. Isa. 5:7 identifies justice and righteousness as Yahweh's desired fruit from the vineyard. With a Hebrew wordplay, these fruits are set in opposition to bloodshed, and crying out.<sup>54</sup> Some scholars, who see the connection between Isa. 5 and Mk 12, conclude that the produce of the vineyard in Mk 12 should be understood as justice and righteousness.<sup>55</sup> If this is the case, and Isa. 28:16 is echoing behind Jesus' use of Ps. 118, then the key words in Isa 28:17a begin to resonate. The ἀκρογωνία is the one who brings justice and righteousness out of the vineyard. The want of good fruit in Isa. 5:7 finds its fulfillment in Isa 28:17a, just as the want of fruit in Mark 12:2 finds its fulfillment in the κεφαλὴν γωνίας of Mk 12:10.

Next, Isa. 28:11-13 speaks of Judah's leaders who refuse to hear the warnings of the prophet. Looking backwards through Mark, it becomes clear that the rejection of the prophet coheres with three components at work in Mk 12. First, the servants within the parable can be compared to the unheeded prophet of in Isa. 28:13. Second, Jesus' response concerning John's authority (Mk 11:27-33) can be understood in light of Judah's refusal of Yahweh (Isa. 28:14-15). Third, the leaders' inability to hear identifies them with the leaders of Judah who were in charge during the destruction of the first temple (Isa. 28 11-13).

Lastly, an echo of Isa. 28 finds surprising thematic coherence in the narrative

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<sup>52</sup> One could speculate that, tenants who refuse to give up the produce of a vineyard insinuates drunkenness.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia K. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39* (Smyth & Helwys, 2010); 420.

<sup>54</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* Wm. B. (Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>55</sup> Robert Horton Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Eerdmans, 1993); 659.

immediately following 12:1-12 as well. One of the reasons for judgement stated in Isa. 28 is the leaders' relationship to "Sheol" (Isa. 28:15). There is some debate about this reference, but there is consensus that it involves Judah's political dealings (or alliance) with Egypt. While more speculative, an Isa 28 echo could help interpret why the very next action taken by Jerusalem's leaders is an attempt to trap Jesus with questions about paying taxes to Caesar.

An Isa. 28 echo allows for a more satisfying reading of Mark 12:1-12. Our understanding of the cornerstone is enhanced by the entire context of Isaiah's stone texts. Questions regarding the identity of the vineyard, tenants, and servants find a new interpretive horizon. Additionally, hearing Isa. 28 behind the text subverts anti-semitic readings. The judgement pronounced in Isa. 28 did not mark the end of Israel. Rather, it marked the beginning of exile. Likewise, the judgement pronounced by Jesus in the Temple does not mark the destruction of Israel, but rather its renewal *in* and *upon* Jesus. And all who do not trust in this precious cornerstone cast *themselves* into exile.

### *Conclusion*

The data show that hearing an echo of Isa. 28 in Mark 12:1-12 is indeed reasonable. Special attention to five of Hays' seven tests (*history of interpretation, volume, historical plausibility, thematic coherence, and satisfaction*) demonstrates the importance of including Isa. 28 within the interpretive horizon of this passage. This echo illuminates the judgement pronounced by Jesus in 11:12-13:37 as a part of Isaiah's "strange deeds" of the Lord that will bring about renewal (Isa 28:21). Those who reject Jesus exile themselves, while those who trust will be counted among the remnant. Hearing Isa. 28 behind Mk 12:10-11 calls readers to slow down and resist hastily interpreting this passage as a mere prediction of vindication. What is lost in such a reading is not only a proper fear of the Lord (Isa 8:13) but also an appropriate



appreciation of the depth of his love. Hearing the full weight of Jesus' judgement adds to the impact of his passion. After all, the judgement he pronounces (Mk 12:1-12), he also endures on our behalf (Mk 15:16-20)!

This also comes from the Lord of hosts;  
He is wonderful in counsel,  
and excellent in wisdom.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 28:29 NRSV.

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