

ISA 5:1-7 LXX AND MARK 12:1, 9, AGAIN

by

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Craig A. Evans has offered a learned and generous response to a paper published in this journal in 2002, disputing some of the conclusions that I reached.¹ The purpose of his intervention is to defend the view that “Isaiah’s song of the Vineyard served as the original point of departure for the parable of the vineyard,” though he allows that the *form* of the allusion to Isa 5:1-7 may have been “secondarily Septuagintalized.”²

In my paper I had come to a different conclusion: that the allusion to Isaiah 5 in Mark 12:1, 9 is purely Septuagintal and hence, that there is no compelling reason to suppose that the parable, if it came from the historical Jesus, made explicit allusion to Isaiah. In this paper I shall summarize the arguments made in 2002, adding a few buttressing points.

This conclusion was based on a demonstration that the Septuagint’s rendering of Isa 5:1-7 MT involved a reconceptualizing of Isaiah’s parable, a reconceptualization visible in Mark. The LXX revised the Hebrew version in three main respects. First, it rationalized the complex alternation of grammatical persons in the MT, which begins in the first person (אֲשֶׁרָהָ אָנֹכִי לִידְרֵי שֵׁנָה דְּדוּרֵי לְקַרְנֹה, v. 1a) but then shifts to the third (vv. 1b-2), returning to the first person in vv. 3-6, and shifting back to the third person in the final verse. The MT thus presents a ‘nested’ discourse in which Isaiah first speaks in the first person of his ‘friend’ (v. 1a), describing in the third person his friend’s vineyard (vv. 1b-2), then reporting the friend’s first person speech to his vineyard (vv. 4-6), concluding with his own third-person commen-

¹ Craig A. Evans, “How Septuagintal is Isa 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9?” *NovT* 45, no. 2 (2003), 105-10, responding to John S. Kloppenborg, “Egyptian Viticultural Practices and the Citation of Isa 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9,” *NovT* 44, no. 2 (2002), 134-59.

² Evans, “Isa 5:1-7,” 110.

tary (v. 7). Except for v. 1b (ἀμπελῶν ἐγενήθη τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ ἐν κέρατι ἐν πόπῳ πίονι), the LXX casts the entire speech in the first person, thus treating the parable as God's speech, rather than Isaiah's account of his friend's activities and speech. The same transformation incidentally can be seen in *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7, which turns the entire discourse into a first-person speech, prefaced by "the prophets said" (אמר נביאי).

Second, while the MT envisions a plot of virgin soil in need of being broken and de-stoned, the LXX seems to treat it instead as an existing plot converted to viticulture. Thus in place of the MT's פָּרַק וְסָדַק, 'he broke up the clods and cleared the stones', the LXX describes the building of a palisade (φραγμός) and the staking of the vines (ἐχαράκωσα). Both actions were key to the establishing of a vineyard as a viable, legal entity. Staking was one of the main methods of vine-support in Egypt (apparently less so in Palestine),³ and a palisade was important for maintaining a vineyard for two reasons: because the palisade protected the grapes from the ravages of draught animals, sheep and boars and discouraged passers-by from using the vineyard as a throughfare; and since vineyards were subject to higher tax rates than other agricultural lands, it was important to demark their boundaries clearly.⁴ The LXX reflects practices that we know to have been current in Egypt in the Hellenistic period; we are much less well informed about agricultural and fiscal practices in Jewish Palestine during this period, and they may well have been Palestinian practice too. But the key point is that the LXX give no hint of the MT's scenario of virgin land being broken, but seems to imagine the creation of a vineyard from an existing field. This no doubt reflects the land usage of Egypt (and Jewish Palestine) in the Hellenistic period, when virtually all of the available land was already under cultivation.

The third transformation is important, since it indicates that the LXX conceives the vineyard in question as *leased* land. The MT

³ E.g., *P ColZenon* II 79.9 (Philadelphia; before 246 B.C.E.); *PSI* IV 393.6 (Philadelphia; 241 B.C.E.). In Palestine it seems more usual either to have free-standing vines (Ezek 17:6 and probably Judg 9:8-15; Varro, *De re rustica* 1.8.4-6; see also the depiction of vines in Judah in the Nineveh relief of the capture of Lachish in John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], plates 203-7) or trellises. Rabbinic sources more frequently mention the use of a trellis (טריס) for the support of vines, a practice that might also be presupposed by the phrase "every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (איש תחת עץ תאנהו וכל תחת עץ זיתו) in 1 Kgs 5:5; cf. Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; Ps 80:10; Cant 7:8. See *m. Kil.* 6.6-9.

⁴ E.g., *PRyl* IV 583.16 (Philadelphia; 170 B.C.E.); *BGU* IV 1119.32 (Alexandria; 6/5 B.C.E.). On taxation, see William L. Westermann, "Orchard and Vineyard Taxes in the Zenon Papyri," *JEA* 12 (1926), 38-51.

conceived of the failure of the vineyard to consist in the corruption of what was initially planted, of fine grapes (קִיטָה) becoming 'stinking grapes' (קִיטָה רָעָה). In v. 7 the speaker decodes this odd happening with the explanation that he had expected justice (מִשְׁפָּט) but found bloodshed (דָּמָה), and looked for righteousness (צְדָקָה) but heard only an outcry (קִיטָה רָעָה), a set of word-plays that the LXX could not replicate.

By contrast the LXX treats the failure as one of contamination by thorns (ἄκανθα). This alteration has important consequences. Contamination by weeds was a major threat to wine growing, and contemporary Ptolemaic and early Roman viticultural contracts routinely imposed on the tenant the obligation to weed (βοτανίζειν)⁵ and to keep the vineyard free of contaminants such as rushes, grass, and other weeds.⁶ This means that the LXX reader must assume that the vineyard was being tended not by the owner, but by tenants, who had been negligent in respect to their contractual obligations. Otherwise, the owner would have no grounds for complaint, for if he were caring for the vineyard directly, the failure would be his. The assumption of tenancy is all the more reasonable when we note that it was the rule rather than the exception for vineyard owners not to cultivate them directly, but rather to employ vinedressers, a specialized skill in antiquity, and other tenants on the basis of a crop-share arrangement.⁷ Thus the LXX's version of Isaiah's parable has already implicit in it a scenario of failed tenancy.

⁵ E.g., *PLaur* IV 166.3 (289/90 C.E.); *PLond* I 131r.41, 62, 71, 76, 78 and passim (= *SB* VIII 9699) (78/9 C.E.); *POxy* XIV 1631.14, 26 (280 C.E.); 1692.18 (188 C.E.); *POxy* XLVII 3354.13-14 (257 C.E.); *PSI* XIII 1338.6 (299 C.E.).

⁶ *BGU* IV 1115.49 (13 B.C.E.); 1116.16 (13 B.C.E.); 1119.30-31; 1127.16 (18 B.C.E.); *PAmh* II 90.21 (159 C.E.); 91.23 (159 C.E.); *PBerlLeihg* I 19.37 (54 C.E.); *PFlor* III 369.19 (139/49 C.E.); *PMert* I 10.20-21 (21 C.E.); *PMert* II 68.33 (137 C.E.); *PMich* VII 634.17 (25/26 C.E.); XIV 678.13 (98 C.E.); *POxy* IV 729.22 (137 C.E.); *POxy* VI 910.41 (197 C.E.); *POxy* XLI 2973.26 (103 C.E.); *POxy* XLVII 3354.46 (257 C.E.); *PRossGeorg* II 19.41 (141 C.E.); *PRyl* IV 583.15 (170 B.C.E.); *PSI* VII 788.7 (125 C.E.); *PSI* X 1124.29 (150 C.E.); *PSoter* 1.39 (69 C.E.); *PStras* V 465.26 (II C.E.); 539.14 (290 C.E.); *PTebt* I 105.5, 26 (103 B.C.E.); 106.25 (101 B.C.E.); *SB* XIV 11279.34 (44 C.E.).

⁷ For details, see John S. Kloppenborg, *Reading Viticulture: The Social Context of the Parable of the Tenants in Mark and Thomas*, Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Occasional Papers, no. 44 (Claremont, Calif: Claremont Graduate University, 2002), and more generally, Jane Rowlandson, *Landowners and Tenants in Roman Egypt: The Social Relations of Agriculture in the Oxyrhynchite Nome*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1996); Johannes Herrmann, *Studien zur Bodenpacht im Recht der graeco-ägyptischen Papyri*, Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte, vol. 41 (München: C.H. Beck, 1958).

The argument of my earlier article a propos of Mark 12:1, 9 was, accordingly simple. Not only does the parable reflect the situation of tenancy imagined by the LXX, but Mark's allusion to Isa 5:1-7 betrays the exclusively Septuagintal phrase *καὶ φραγμὸν περιέθηκα*, recasting only slightly as *καὶ περιέθηκεν φραγμὸν*.⁸ Mark also uses *ὑπολήνιον* ('collecting vat') where the LXX has *προλήνιον* and the MT has *כַּרְמֵי*. Since the normal rendering of *yeqeb* in the LXX is *ληνός*,⁹ and since *προλήνιον* is otherwise unattested in Greek before the fourth century C.E. (and only then in commentaries on Isaiah),¹⁰ it seems a reasonable conjecture that Mark replaced the LXX's *hapax legomenon* with another Septuagintal word, *ὑπολήνιον*. Finally, Mark's *τί οὖν ποιήσει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος* (v. 9) agrees with the LXX's use of the future interrogative (v. 4, *τί ποιήσω ἔτι τῷ ἀμπελῶνί μου*) against the MT's *מָה לַכֶּרֶם עֹד יַעֲשֶׂה יְיָ* (v. 4). Thus I could observe, "Mark agrees with the LXX, but never with the MT *against* the LXX"¹¹ and on that basis conclude that there is no reason to suppose that the parable's use of Isaiah is other than Septuagintal.

Evans is right to point out that the fact that Mark's allusion contains Septuagintalisms does not logically preclude the possibility that the parable alluded to Isa 5:1-7 from its very inception, presumably in a Semitic-speaking environment, and that its use of Isaiah might have been assimilated to the LXX in the course of transmission. But he disputes my observation concerning the parable's non-agreement with the MT against the LXX, citing three points.

First, he observes that Mark agrees with the MT's third person verbs (*וַיַּעַב, וַיִּבֶן, וַיִּצְרַף*) against the LXX's first person.¹² It should be added that Mark also disagrees with the *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7 in this respect, which like the LXX employs the first person. Evans' point may be granted,

⁸ I use 'Mark' to refer to the agent who framed the parable in Greek. Like most modern critics, I do not think that the parable in Greek is the work of the second evangelist, but more likely was already in Mark's sources. For the purpose of this article, however, the distinction is not relevant.

⁹ Num 18:27, 30; Deut 15:14; 16:14; 2 Kgs 6:27; Hos 9:2; Joel 2:24 (in all instances, paired with *goram*, 'threshing floor'); Prov 3:10 (paired with *'asan*, 'barn'); Jer 48:33 (LXX 31:30); Lam 1:15. *Yeqeb* is rendered by *ὑπολήνιον* at Isa 16:10; Joel 4:13; Hag 2:16; and Zech 14:10.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos* on Ps 8 (MPG 23:125); Athanasius, *Expositiones in Psalmos* on Ps 8 (MPG 27:80); Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam* (MPG 70:137); John Chrysostom, *Interpretatio in Isaiam Prophetam* 5 (MPG 56:58); Theodoret, *Commentaria in Esiam* 2.470 (ed. Guinot, 1.230).

¹¹ Kloppenborg, "Egyptian Viticultural Practices," 159 (emphasis original).

¹² Evans, "Isa 5:1-7," 106-7.

but it hardly needs stating that insofar as the parable is telling a *story* rather than reporting a speech, the use of the third person is required. Mark could not retain the first person regardless of whether his immediate source was the MT, the LXX, or the *Tg. Isaiah*. This ‘agreement’ is thus without source-critical significance.

Second, Evans states, “at other points Isa. 5:1-7 in Mark clearly does not agree with the LXX, though how closely it may agree with the Hebrew is uncertain,” referring to the LXX’s use of *προσλήνιον* against Mark’s *ὑπολήνιον*.¹³ Such an observation is of dubious merit, however, since Mark’s disagreement with the LXX is not the same thing as an agreement *with* the MT. Moreover, as I have indicated above, there are good reasons for supposing that the editor of the parable, seeing the LXX’s *hapax legomenon* *προσλήνιον*, substituted the synonym *ὑπολήνιον*, which is in any case equally Septuagintal.

Finally, Evans urges that “Mark’s ‘let us kill’ (v. 7) may cohere with the Hebrew’s *כַּשֵּׁף* (‘bloodshed’) and [that] ‘he will destroy’ may cohere with the Hebrew’s *וַיִּהְיֶה לְבַעַר* (‘it shall be devoured’) and *וַיִּשְׂמַדְתִּי* (‘I shall make it a waste’), for which there are no equivalents in the LXX.”¹⁴ Here again we are dealing not with verbal agreements of the MT with Mark against the LXX, but supposed agreements in sense. But are they convincing?

It should be pointed out at once that Mark’s *δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν* is in fact a verbatim citation of Gen 37:20 LXX, the resolve of Joseph’s brothers to kill him. Moreover, as I pointed out in the original article, while the killing of the son in Mark 12:8 is indeed a matter of ‘bloodshed’, Mark does not use *αἷμα* in his tale but instead the more generic verb *ἀπέκτειναν*. Since the MT’s *mišpaḥ* is a *hapax legomenon*, we have no idea what its ‘normal’ Greek equivalence might have been. For that reason it is impossible to make a case that Mark’s *ἀπέκτειναν* is closer to the MT than the LXX’s *ἀνομία*. Parenthetically, Mark’s parable is also a rather signal instance of lawlessness as well as bloodshed.

That the MT’s *וַיִּהְיֶה לְבַעַר* (which the LXX rendered with *καὶ ἔσται εἰς διαρπαγήν*) has influenced Mark’s *ἀπολλύναι* fares no better as a

¹³ Evans, “Isa 5:1-7,” 107.

¹⁴ Evans, “Isa 5:1-7,” 107. The point was made also by Wim J.C. Weren, “The Use of Isa 5,1-7 in the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12,1-12; Matthew 21,33-46),” *Bib* 79, no. 1 (1998), 11 and earlier by Craig A. Evans, “God’s Vineyard and Its Caretakers,” in *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGAJU, vol. 25 (Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 401 n. 42.

suggestion, since the idiom **לבער תהיה** normally has the connotation of destruction by burning,¹⁵ a sense that is entirely lacking in Mark's parable. And nowhere in the LXX is the idiom rendered with ἀπολλύναι. This means that there is no direct relationship between either the MT's phrase, or the LXX's διαπραγή and Mark's verb. Nor is there any obvious connection between Mark's verb and the Targum, which has God taking away the Shekinah (**אסליק שכינתו מנהון**) with the result that the people will be subject to plundering (**וידון למיבז**).

Finally, there seems little merit to the suggestion that the MT's **אשתחו** **בה** better represents Mark's ἀπολέσει than the LXX's ἀνήσω, since **בה** is another *hapax legomenon* whose meaning can be guessed only from context. It is impossible to make a convincing case for its influence on Mark's parable.

The main burden of Evans' argument is to show that the exegeses of Isa 5:1-7 in 4Q500, *t. Sukkah* 3.15, and especially *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7 cohere "with the anti-Temple establishment thrust of the Markan form of the parable."¹⁶ In particular, Evans notes how Isaiah 5 was interpreted with reference to the Temple and its appurtenances. By the first century B.C.E. there is evidence of an allegorizing exegesis of Isaiah 5 which equated the tower and press of Isaiah's vineyard with the Temple and its altar.¹⁷

This is not the place for a full engagement with the evidence of 4Q500, *t. Sukk.* 3.15 and *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7, but a few points should be made. First, the polemical use of Isaiah 5:1-7 is seen only in Mark 12:1, 9 and the *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7. There is no hint of an anti-Temple polemic in 4Q500 or *t. Sukk.* 3.15. 4Q500 is a paean of praise for the vineyard=Temple, and given Qumran's attitude toward the Herodian temple, it is likely that the 'temple' in view was an eschatological temple whose "growth" will be abundant and whose "channels" will be life-giving.¹⁸ The Tosephta, reporting an opinion of R. Yose b. Ḥalafta (ca. 140-165 C.E.) has:

¹⁵ Num 24:22: **כִּי אֲסֻבְּתָהּ לִבְעֵר קַיִן**, 'yet Kain is destined for burning'; Isa 6:13: **לִבְעֵר** **כַּאֲלֵה וְכַאֲלֵן תֵּעָרַר בָּהּ עֲשָׂרָה וְשִׁבְעָה תִּשְׁבָּר תְּהוּתָהּ**, 'Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak'; Isa 44:15: **תִּהְיֶה לְאִשׁ לְבָעֵר מִקֶּמֶס מִקֶּמֶס תִּשְׂרֹף**, 'Then it can be used by him as fuel. Part of it he takes and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread'.

¹⁶ Evans, "Isa 5:1-7," 107.

¹⁷ See Joseph M. Baumgarten, "4Q500 and the Ancient Conceptions of the Lord's Vineyard," *JJS* 40, no. 1 (1989), 1-6.

¹⁸ Compare Isa 27:2-6, which has Isa 5:1-7 in view but reverses the outcome of Isaiah's woe: the vineyard (*kerem*) will be protected, free from thorns (*šamîr šayit*), and will blossom and put out shoots.

And he built a tower in the midst of it—this is the sanctuary (הַיְהוּדָה); and hewed out a vat in it—this is the altar; and he also (אֲתָ) hewed out a vat therein—this is the channel [or wine sink] (הַיְהוּדָה).¹⁹

Here the Tosephta comments on the Mishnah's discussion of offerings of water and wine on the altar in the Temple (*m. Sukk.* 4:9). The Mishnah had described a pit or sink (שִׁט) under the altar that absorbed or captured the fluids poured on the altar. R. Yose comments on this mishnah first by quoting Isa 5:1-2, and then by offering his construal of *yeqeb* as both the altar and the sink, basing this on the apparently superfluous *gam* in the text, which he took to signal a repetition. What R. Yose's exegesis seems to show is that by his time, the interpretation of Isaiah's *migdal* and *yeqeb* as, respectively, the sanctuary and the altar were already well established. Yose's contribution was to provide an exegetical basis for connecting the Mishnah's *šit* with the *yeqeb* of Isa 5:2. But there is no evidence of Isaiah 5 being used as an anti-Temple polemic.

It is not until the *Tg. Isaiah* that an 'anti-Temple establishment' exegesis of Isa 5:1-7 is evidenced. In the Targum, as in the LXX, there is a sharp distinction made between the vineyard and its custodians or tenants, the latter being blamed for the failure and eventual destruction of the vineyard. Elsewhere too the targumist takes a highly critical view of the administration of the Temple and blame it for the fate that Jerusalem suffered under Titus.²⁰ But it is equally clear that these polemical elements of the targumic presentation of Isaiah 5 must come from the second century at the earliest, and hence are of doubtful value for determining the meaning of Jesus' parable.

¹⁹ The MT is in italica and Yose's commentary in Roman. Also quoted in *y. Sukk.* 4:6, 54d and *b. Sukk.* 49a, both attributed to R. Yose. A very similar tradition is attributed by *t. Me'il.* 1.16 to R. Eleazar b. Zaddok [140-165 C.E.].

²⁰ Bruce Chilton, *Targumic Approaches to the Gospels: Essays in the Mutual Definition of Judaism and Christianity*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham; New York; London: University Press of America, 1986), 51-61: "[T]he purpose of the meturgeman [in *Tg. Isa.* 22 and 28] seems to have been first of all to attack the entire Temple system, and then to explain the success of the Roman siege with reference to that administration." Chilton (*The Isaiah Targum*, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 11 [Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987], 45) argues that while *Tg. Isa.* 22:15-22:25 perhaps refers to the Hasmonians and almost certainly to Pompey (22:8), these references have been incorporated into "the Tannaitic framework of the Tg. which has a more global Roman military policy in mind" (referring to chap. 23). For criticism of the priests (and scribes), see *Tg. Isa.* 28, where the priests and scribes are accused of neglecting the Torah (28:9-10) and ignoring the prophets (28:11-12), for which reason they were handed over to the Gentiles (28:13).

The elements that are central to the respective exegesis of 4Q500, *t. Sukk.* 3.15 and *Tg. Isa.* 5:1-7—the tower and the vat—play no special role in Mark 12:1-9 other than to show that the vineyard is a real, working vineyard with the normal furnishings. Only an occult reading of Mark could derive references to the altar and the temple from Mark 12:1 and Mark provides no such occult reading. It should be added, moreover, that Mark *reverses* the order of phrases that the Targum later interpreted with reference to the temple and the altar: Mark has the vat first, then the tower, which hardly encourages the allegorical reading that the *Tg. Isaiah* provides. And all of this is prefaced by περιέθηκεν φραγμόν which, of course, being Septuagintal, receives no occult reading in the Targum of Isa 5:1.²¹

It is indeed possible that at some stage in the parable's development, the kind of micro-allegorization of the vineyard's fixtures occurred, although we have no evidence in Christian exegesis of the parable prior to Origen's *Comm. Matt.* 17.6-7 (written after 246 C.E.) of such an allegorization. It is also possible, as Evans urges, that the text of Isaiah 5 was integral to the parable's construction, and that it was secondarily Septuagintalized in the course of transmission. But in view of this analysis, my original conclusion stands: there are no points where Mark's parable agrees with the MT against the LXX, apart from the irrelevant coincidence of agreement in grammatical person, where Mark's text is also as far from the Targum as it is from the LXX. Second, the details that Mark takes from Isaiah 5—the palisade, the collecting vat, and the tower—have every appearance of being secondary accretions: they function neither at the level of the parable's narrative structure (their presence at the opening of the parable is irrelevant to the outcome of the parable, and Luke happily drops them) nor at the level of Mark's discourse, which ignores these elements in his decoding of the parable in vv. 10-11. This being the case, one perhaps ought to shave with Ockham's razor, and conclude that these Septuagintal elements are in fact accretions to the original parable.

²¹ The MT of v. 5 refers to the destruction of the *gader* (LXX φραγμός), which the Targum interprets as the removal of the *Shekinah*.