

Rereading the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard (Mark 12:1-12): A Reflection of Nigeria's Socio-political Context

Abel Aor Inyaregh

National Open University of Nigeria

Rose Yangu Iordaah

Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria

Matthew Vanen Chiangi

University of Mkar, Mkar, Nigeria

Abstract

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard (Mark 12:1-12) presents a compelling narrative that critiques the misuse of power, the failure of leadership, and the consequences of rebellion against divine authority. The parable, narrated by Jesus Christ, depicts a landowner who leases his vineyard to tenants who subsequently abuse and reject his representatives, culminating in their violent rejection of the owner's son. While its theological and historical dimensions have been extensively explored in biblical scholarship, its applicability to contemporary socio-political issues, particularly in the Nigerian context, remains underexamined. This gap in analysis poses a significant challenge, as Nigeria grapples with systemic corruption, leadership crises, and widespread socio-economic disparities that mirror the themes of the parable. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates narrative criticism, historical-critical methods and sociopolitical analysis, this paper uncovers the enduring relevance of the parable as a critique of systemic corruption, leadership failure, and social injustice in contemporary Nigeria. The analysis underscores how the metaphor of the vineyard resonates with Nigeria's abundant natural resources, which have often been mismanaged by leaders akin to the wicked tenants. The study draws lessons that can help Nigeria address revolutionary tensions and promote accountability and equity.

Keywords: Insecurity, Revolution, Socio-political context, Vineyard, Wicked Tenants

Introduction

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard (Mark 12:1-12) stands as one of the most poignant and multifaceted narratives in the New Testament. Delivered by Jesus Christ during His final week in

Jerusalem, the parable employs vivid imagery: a vineyard, tenants, servants, and a beloved son to convey profound truths about human responsibility, divine authority, and the consequences of rebellion. While its primary audience was the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time, the parable transcends its

original setting to offer timeless insights into issues of power, accountability, and justice. In contemporary times, the narrative continues to resonate across diverse cultural and socio-political contexts, including

Nigeria, a nation grappling with systemic corruption, leadership crises, and socio-economic disparities.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of its largest economies, is endowed with vast natural resources, particularly oil, which could position it as a global leader in development and prosperity. However, decades of mismanagement, political instability, and widespread corruption have stifled the nation's potential, leaving millions of its citizens mired in poverty and disillusionment. Against this backdrop, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants emerges as a compelling lens to examine Nigeria's socio-political landscape. The metaphor of the vineyard, symbolising God's provision and blessing, finds a striking parallel in Nigeria's abundant resources, while the tenants' exploitation and violence mirror the greed and abuse of power endemic in the country's leadership structures. Furthermore, the rejection of the landowner's son echoes the marginalisation of the Nigerian populace and the betrayal of democratic principles by those entrusted with governance.

This study seeks to explore the intersection between the theological message of Mark 12:1-12 and the socio-political realities of Nigeria. It aims to demonstrate how the parable can serve not only as a critique of current challenges but also as a catalyst for reflection and transformation. By analysing the parable's themes, stewardship, accountability, justice, and divine judgment in the Nigerian context, this research contributes to ongoing discussions about the

role of religious narratives in addressing societal issues. The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to bridge biblical scholarship with contemporary African realities, offering a fresh perspective on how ancient wisdom can inform modern governance and civic engagement.

The Parallel Accounts within the Synoptic and Markan Traditions

Scholars agree that this parable is one of the most problematic parables of the synoptic tradition¹. It is one of the most important, deliberated and complex of all the parables². Quite a lot of problems have been vastly argued³. The controversy focused on the debate

¹ Kelly 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): 305-335; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Assessment," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 187.

² Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 276. Within traditional exegesis, the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen has been regarded as an allegory wherein Jesus exposed the murderous extremes to which Jews were capable of going in resisting the servants of God, who are to be identified as the prophets. Murdering the son/Son, Jesus Christ, however, proved to be the last straw that culminated in the Lord of the vineyard returning to destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others; (Mark 12:9/-namely, the Church).

³From the assessed literature in this study, the source of the parable is disputed. Some disagree that it stems from a pre-synoptic source while others argue that it is artificial, not ascribed to the historical Jesus and created by the early Church. Scholarly compromise held that Psalm 118:22 is neither original to the parable nor articulated by Jesus but it's a subsequent addition or redaction by the early church. The craving on the part of scholars to evade any thought of judgment and elude any linkage with Jesus is contested. Despite the flourished exegesis, it is challenging that the superfluity of research does not yield a compromise in clarification as discrepancies abound. They allude to the murdered son as John the

to determine whether the parable is an untainted allegory or a normal story. The identity of the characters, landlord, tenants, servants, and son, is examined to discern if they epitomise Jesus' framework. Or is it just a far-long description of embryonic anti-Jewish mawkishness? How is the condensed form in Thomas L.65–66 the earliest and most dependable version downplayed in the synoptic narratives? (Surely, you can indicate parallels in synoptic accounts, Matthew 21:33-46, Luke 20:9-19, in the Gospel of Thomas 65-66). This Parable in Mark 12:1-12 is a significant teaching within the Synoptic Gospels and serves as an allegory for Israel's history of rejecting God's messengers and ultimately His Son.

In Mark's account, Jesus tells the story of a vineyard owner who leases his vineyard to tenants and sends servants to collect the produce. The tenants mistreat or kill these servants, and finally, the owner sends his beloved son, whom they also kill. Jesus concludes with a quotation from Psalm 118:22-23 about the rejected cornerstone becoming the capstone, warning that the kingdom of God will be taken away from those who reject it and given to others. Mark's version emphasises the authority of Jesus and foreshadows His impending death at the hands of the religious leaders. It also underscores the theme of divine judgment against those who reject God's messengers⁴.

Baptist or representatives of the Roman hierarchy. To compound the problem, some have argued that the parable is a pure allegory and others a natural story. Dodd and Jeremias argue that the parable reflects the background of the revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants towards foreign landlords.

⁴ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 845-850.

Matthew expands on Mark's narrative, adding more detail and sharpening the application of the parable. For instance, Matthew specifies that the vineyard had a "hedge", "winepress", and "tower" (Matt 21:33), drawing directly from Isaiah 5:1-7⁵, which describes Israel as God's vineyard.

The dialogue between Jesus and the chief priests and Pharisees is extended. After telling the parable, Jesus asks them what the owner should do (Matt 21:40), prompting their own admission of judgment: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death" (Matt 21:41). Matthew explicitly identifies the tenants as representing the Jewish leaders (Matt 21:45). Matthew's additions heighten the polemic against the religious authorities, making the parable even more confrontational. His use of Isaiah reinforces the connection between Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and the current rejection of Jesus⁶.

Luke's account (20:9-19) closely follows Mark but includes some unique features: The sequence of events differs slightly; Luke mentions the servants being sent "at the proper time" (Luke 20:10), emphasising the appropriateness of God's timing. Luke omits the direct reference to Psalm 118 but retains the imagery of the rejected stone (Luke 20:17-18). He adds Jesus' explanation that "everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed" (Luke 20:18), intensifying the warning of judgment.

Luke softens the antagonism toward the Jewish leaders compared to Matthew, focusing instead on

⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 801.

⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary. Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 25-29.

universal accountability before God⁷. Luke's rendering reflects his broader theological emphasis on salvation history and inclusivity, presenting the parable as a call to repentance rather than solely a condemnation of specific groups⁸.

Synoptic Comparisons and Theological Implications

While all three Synoptic Gospels share the core elements of the parable, each evangelist adapts it to suit their audience and theological purposes. For Markan priority, scholars widely agree that Mark was written first, with Matthew and Luke expanding upon it⁹. Mark's brevity and focus on Jesus' authority align with his overall purpose of portraying Jesus as the suffering Messiah. In the Matthean expansion, Matthew amplifies the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, likely reflecting tensions between early Christians and the synagogue community after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE¹⁰. In Lukan adaptation, Luke tailors the parable for a Gentile audience, minimising anti-Jewish rhetoric while emphasising God's impartial judgment and invitation to all peoples¹¹.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants functions as both a prophetic critique and an invitation to faithfulness.

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV. AB 28A* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1249-253.

⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke. NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 710-715.

⁹ Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 101-105.

¹⁰ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. ICC.* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 345-350.

¹¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text. NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 719-724.

In Mark, it highlights Jesus' authority and the impending consequences of rejecting Him. Matthew sharpens this critique into a pointed accusation against the religious elite, while Luke broadens its scope to address universal human responsibility. Together, these accounts demonstrate how the Synoptic writers creatively adapted Jesus' teachings to communicate timeless truths to diverse audiences. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Mark 12:1-12, along with its parallels in Matthew 21:33-46 and Luke 20:9-19, reveals distinct yet complementary emphases across the Synoptic traditions, rooted in Markan priority and shaped by each Gospel writer's theological concerns and intended audience.

Immediate Context: Jesus' Confrontation with Religious Authorities

The immediate context of the parable is set during Jesus' final days in Jerusalem, a period marked by mounting tensions between Him and the Jewish religious establishment. According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus dramatically enters Jerusalem, riding on a donkey amidst the acclamation of the crowds (Mark 11:1-11). Shortly thereafter, He performs a symbolic act of cleansing the Temple, overturning the tables of money changers and driving out those who had turned the sacred space into a marketplace (Mark 11:15-19). This act of defiance against the Temple system provokes outrage among the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who perceive Jesus as a threat to their authority and the status quo.

It is within this charged atmosphere that the parable is delivered. Mark 11:27-33 recounts how these leaders confront Jesus, demanding to know by what authority He acts. Jesus responds with a counter-question about John the Baptist's authority, skillfully deflecting their

challenge and exposing their hypocrisy. The following day, as Jesus resumes teaching in the Temple, the religious leaders return, seeking to entrap Him with questions about paying taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13-17) and the resurrection (Mark 12:18-27). It is against this backdrop of escalating conflict that Jesus tells the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.

The parable is unmistakably directed at the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who are explicitly present in the narrative (Mark 12:12). By using the imagery of a vineyard and rebellious tenants, Jesus crafts a pointed allegory that indicts these leaders for their failure to fulfil their God-given responsibilities. The vineyard, a well-known biblical symbol of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7), represents God's covenantal relationship with His people. The tenants, who abuse and kill the landowner's messengers, symbolise the religious leaders who have rejected God's prophets and, ultimately, His Son. The parable's climax, the destruction of the tenants and the transfer of the vineyard to others foreshadow the judgment that awaits these leaders and signals the inclusion of Gentiles in God's redemptive plan¹².

By delivering the parable in this immediate context, Jesus not only exposes the corruption and self-interest of the religious authorities but also asserts His own

authority as the Son sent by the Father. The parable serves as both a warning and a prophecy, encapsulating the themes of accountability, rebellion, and divine judgment that permeate His ministry¹³.

Remote Context: First-Century Judean Society and Roman Occupation

To fully appreciate the parable's impact, it is necessary to consider the broader socio-political and religious dynamics of first-century Judea. At this time, Judea was under Roman occupation, a reality that profoundly shaped the lives of its inhabitants. The Roman Empire imposed heavy taxes, enforced strict control over local governance, and maintained a military presence to suppress dissent. While the Romans allowed a degree of religious autonomy, they appointed puppet rulers, such as Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, to oversee the region and ensure compliance with imperial policies.

The vineyard, a central motif in the parable, would have been immediately recognisable to Jesus' listeners as a symbol of agricultural production, a primary source of wealth in agrarian Judean society. However, ownership of such vineyards was often concentrated in the hands of absentee landlords, wealthy elites or foreign rulers who exploited tenant farmers for profit. These tenants, typically impoverished labourers, worked the land under oppressive lease agreements that left them perpetually indebted to their landlords. The economic exploitation

¹² As the narrative progresses, the tenants' rebellion against the landowner mirrors the actions of the religious authorities, who reject God's messengers (the prophets) and ultimately His Son. Jesus concludes the parable with a quotation from Psalm 118:22-23, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone", a clear allusion to His own impending rejection and crucifixion by those in power. This deliberate framing underscores the parable's immediate purpose: to expose the hypocrisy and moral failure of the religious elite while foreshadowing the consequences of their rejection of divine authority.

¹³ Through this confrontation, Jesus not only indicts the religious authorities but also invites His listeners to reflect on their own roles within the vineyard. The parable serves as a prophetic warning, urging them to realign themselves with God's justice and mercy before it is too late. Thus, the immediate context of the parable highlights its dual function: as a critique of existing power structures and as a call to repentance and transformation.

inherent in this system mirrored the broader dynamics of Roman imperial rule, where Judea was treated as a resource to be extracted for Rome's benefit. Heavy taxation, forced labour, and land confiscations were common practices that exacerbated poverty and resentment among the local population¹⁴.

Against this backdrop, the religious authorities, the chief priests, scribes, and elders occupied a precarious position. While they held significant influence within Jewish society, their power was contingent upon cooperation with Roman overseers. This collaboration often entailed enforcing policies that further marginalised the poor and disenfranchised. For instance, the temple tax and sacrificial system, controlled by the priestly class, placed additional financial burdens on ordinary Jews, deepening the divide between the ruling elite and the masses¹⁵. The religious leaders thus became complicit in sustaining a system that prioritized wealth accumulation and political stability over justice and compassion¹⁶.

The socio-economic conditions of first-century Judea further exacerbated tensions. The majority of the population lived in poverty, burdened by high taxes,

debt, and land dispossession¹⁷. The Temple system, with its elaborate rituals and offerings, disproportionately affected the poor, who were required to contribute a significant portion of their meagre resources. Meanwhile, the wealthy elite, including many of the religious leaders, amassed considerable wealth and influence. This stark disparity fueled resentment and unrest, creating fertile ground for movements advocating social justice and liberation.

Against this backdrop, Jesus' ministry emerged as a radical alternative to the prevailing systems of power and oppression. His teachings emphasized compassion, humility, and service, challenging the hierarchical structures upheld by the religious and political authorities. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants, therefore, must be understood as part of this broader critique. By portraying the tenants as violent and unfaithful stewards, Jesus highlights the failures of those entrusted with leadership and calls for a return to the principles of justice and righteousness¹⁸.

¹⁴ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 45-46.

¹⁵ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 123.

¹⁶ Within this oppressive framework, the Jewish religious leaders occupied a precarious position. As custodians of the Law and the Temple, they were responsible for maintaining spiritual and communal order. However, their collaboration with the Roman authorities often compromised their moral authority and alienated them from the common people. Many Jews viewed the religious elite as complicit in perpetuating Roman rule, prioritizing their own power and privilege over the welfare of the nation.

¹⁷The parable's depiction of the tenants killing the landowner's servants and son reflects the pervasive violence and resistance that characterized Judean society under Roman occupation. The period leading up to Jesus' ministry was marked by numerous uprisings and acts of rebellion against Roman authority, often fueled by messianic expectations and hopes for liberation. Groups such as the Zealots advocated for armed resistance, while others sought reform through nonviolent means. In this climate of unrest, the image of rebellious tenants violently opposing the landowner's representatives would have resonated deeply with Jesus' audience, evoking both sympathy and fear.

¹⁸ At the same time, the parable critiques the religious authorities' failure to fulfill their role as stewards of God's covenant. By rejecting the prophets and ultimately plotting against Jesus, they mirror the tenants' betrayal of the landowner's trust. This parallel underscores the broader theme of accountability, reminding listeners that those

Identity of the Characters and Interpretation

In Markan text, the man who plants the vineyard is God the Father. The vineyard is Israel (cf. Isaiah 5:1-7). The tenants¹⁹ were the scribes, chief priests, and elders who would kill the prophets sent by Yahweh and eventually, they eliminated his only begotten son, Jesus. The servants represent the prophets God sent to Israel, and the wicked vinedressers 'beat' one servant denoting the harsh, unjust treatment God's servants received. They kill another, representing the many prophets who died at the hands of Israel's leaders. They stone a third, not necessarily to death, for Mark records, "At him, they cast stones and wounded him in the head, and sent him away." wicked vinedressers' actions show their rejection, not of the servants, but of the landowner, God. Scholars²⁰ argue that the kingdom is taken from the chief priests and Pharisees in Matt 21:43. Concerning the Matthean account, Davies and Allison accurately argue that the parable suggests nothing about the eschatological fate of Israel, and

entrusted with leadership bear a responsibility to uphold justice and righteousness. The parable thus serves as both a reflection of the socio-economic realities of first-century Judea and a prophetic indictment of those who abuse their power.

¹⁹ Brevard S. Childs sees the tenants as the entire people of Israel (*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 342.).

²⁰ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Secret of Jesus' Divine Sonship in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations*. *JBL* 105 (1986): 643-55; Ulrich Mell, *Die "anderen" Winzer: Eine exegetische Studie zur Vollmacht Jesu Christi nach Markus 11, 27-12, 34* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), 149-51; Robert H. Stein, *Luke. The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 490; David Stern, *Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen*, 42-80 in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod. (New York: Paulist, 1989), 52.

any notion that the parable indicates the final rejection of the Jewish people is eisegesis²¹.

The Bible often compares Israel to a vine or a collection of vines in a vineyard (Psalm 80:8-15; Isaiah 5:1-7). The vinedressers represent the civil and religious leaders of Israel and Judah, whose duty was to guide the nation righteously but who were corrupt in their dealings. The vineyard being leased to them represents their provisional ownership and responsibility to care for it. The landowner (God) planted a hedge (the law with all its ordinances) around the vineyard to protect the vineyard from outside attack, keeping Israel distinct from other nations for His superior purpose. The tower signifies God's watchful oversight of the nation.

Variation in Synoptic Account and Gospel of Thomas

Sevrin conducts conceivably the utmost substantial argument regarding the parable in the Gospel of Thomas by assessing the assemblage of three parables in logia 63-65: the Rich Fool, the Great Banquet (which Thomas directs against buyers and merchants), and the Wicked Tenants²². The preamble of all three is nearly similar: "A man had..." The drive of Thomas, classifying these three, is to show the vanity of any effort to accumulate wealth since riches are an obstacle to salvation. Concerning the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Sevrin contended that Thomas has pointedly changed the parable by concentrating on the

²¹ William. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. 3 vols. *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. 1997), 3.

²² Jean-Marie Sevrin, *Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L'Evangile selon Thomas*: EvTh 63, 64, 65; 425-39 in *Les paraboles paraboles evangeliques: Perspective nouvelles*, ed. Jean Delorme (Paris: du Cerf, 1989).

servant's absence of knowledge (Possibly he did not know them) and the tenants' custody of knowledge. Knowledge is a crucial motif for Thomas²³. Thus, Servin's argument that the Gospel of Thomas is a reinterpretation of the Synoptic tradition is actually robust.

Probing Mark's Parable: Mark 12: 1-12

The parable of the wicked husbandmen in Mark 12:1-12, Matt 21:33-46, Luke 20:9-19, and the Gospel of Thomas, logion 65, where it is trailed by the cornerstone saying in logion 66. In each of these forms of the parable, an absentee landlord establishes a fruitful vineyard in the hands of tenant farmers. According to Mark²⁴, when the time came, he sent a

servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard (Mark 12:2). Jesus did something very unique by quoting an OT passage to end a parable.²⁵ These events took place during the days proximately leading up to His arrest and crucifixion on the cross²⁶. Following a challenge by the chief priests and scribes regarding His authority in ministry, Jesus offered this parable²⁷ to those who were present in the Temple that day, including the chief priests and scribes. This parable is fixated on a vineyard, being planted by a certain man and leased out for others to take care of, harvesting the fruit it produced. The relationship between the owner of the vineyard and those who leased it was strained to say the least. While the owner had provided a profitable and helpful condition for those who leased the vineyard, they were unappreciative and sought to take advantage of the owner's kindness and generosity²⁸.

This parable²⁹ deals principally with the nation of Israel; she is pictured as the vineyard, the Jews are portrayed as the husbandmen who leased the vineyard, and God is the owner of the vineyard. Jesus

²³ With this stress the writer has painted the tenants as positive characters and the servants, negative ones. On this reading the landlord does not signify God but a man of wealth whose riches result to ruin. The matches between the parable of the Rich Man in logion 63 and the Wicked Tenants in logion 65 then has an additional implication. Both emphasize on a man of wealth and fruits, then close briskly with death, and have the added maxim, "He who has ears, let him hear." Thus, Servin's argument that the Gospel of Thomas is a reinterpretation of the Synoptic tradition is actually robust. See Sevrin, *Un groupement de trois paraboles*, 437.

²⁴ The researchers trending in the most recent research unveils that Mark did not allegorize the parable as claimed; See Jeremias and Dodd argue that the parable is an authentic portrayal of actions. Galilee, at the time of Jesus, had several absentee landowners who, consistent with specified agreements, were eligible, during the harvest period, to get share of the produce as their own. That a servant should have been committed to implement this moderately modest duty likewise suits the normal exercise of the day. On a profound level, nevertheless, the Jewish prospect of understanding brings to this recounted incident interpretative thrusts which enhance the denotation of the parable. The vineyard planted by the Lord is the people of Israel (cf., e.g., Isa 5:5, Jer 2:21, Hos 10:1). In his absence, the Lord places some right-hand individuals in charge of his people. Then, at the appropriate time, he sends a servant. See Joachim

Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954).

²⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation* (WUNT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 64.

²⁶ Snodgrass, "Recent Research," 190.

²⁷ In the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), Jesus did something very unique by quoting an OT passage to conclude a parable; Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 64.

²⁸ Johannes C. De Moor "The Targumic Background of Mark 12:1-12: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29 no. 1 (1998): 72.

²⁹ Parables picture real events, even though they may not have occurred; Armand Puig Tàrrach, "The Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard: The Narrative Outline and Its Socio-Historical Plausibility," *Biblische Notizen* 158 (2013), 102.

exposed the situation in Israel at that moment in time and how God observed their obligation and submission to Him. While this is given prophetically and practically to Israel at that moment in her history, it definitely has an application for contemporary generations.

Dodd and Jeremias grasp the parable of the Tenants in Mark 12:1-12 as a reverberation of the revolutionary uproar that had triumphed in Palestine since the time of Judas the Galilean in 6 CE: agrarian displeasure, tensions between foreign absentee landlords and Zealot-inspired tenants are the revealing of the parable³⁰. This reading is preposterous and cannot hold water because Jesus' response to the question about His authority from the pericope, "I am the beloved Son and the Chief Cornerstone made the Jewish leaders leave Him and go away. They knew that the parable was preached against them, but their hearts were hardened. In so doing, Dodd and Jeremias were riding on the wrong horse by equating the parable of the Tenants to the time of Jesus when most of Galilee was parcelled out to foreign landlords in the form of an estate. The landlord of the vineyard thus is a foreigner who lives abroad. As such, the parable reflects the background of the revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants towards foreign landlords.

The Establishment of the Vineyard

Jesus spoke of a particular vineyard³¹. He divulged that the vineyard had been well-prepared and

equipped for achievement. Those left in charge of the vineyard had everything required to yield much fruit. The owner had planted a vineyard, selecting the site of the vineyard and what kinds of fruit and vines it would contain. God had brought Israel out of Egypt's bondage, planting them in a land of great richness. They were blessed to have been planted there by God.

To avoid insecurity, the owner also set a hedge around the vineyard and built a watchtower, both for the protection of the vineyard. The hedge served as a barrier from anyone or anything that would bring destruction, and the tower permitted the reflection of looming terrorisations. God had put a hedge about Israel, keeping her sheltered from her enemies down through the ages. She had suffered captivity, but God had conserved a remnant. He had provided faithful prophets throughout her history to caution her of the approaching terrorisation and direct Israel toward the Lord.

In addition, the owner had dug a room for the wine to be collected, producing the grape juice for feasting. He had provided a location for the husbandmen to be fruitful and enjoy the fruit of their labour. God had blessed Israel with a land that flowed with milk and honey, providing for them for generations. He had repeatedly conserved them and met their wants. God had been faithful to Israel.

Once the vineyard was planted and formed, the owner leased it out to custodians to tend the vineyard and bring in the plentiful produce. He relied on these men to loyally care for his vineyard. Jesus was articulating chiefly to the chief priests and scribes, those accountable for the spiritual security of Israel. God had assigned the priests and prophets down through the ages to care for His vineyard, the nation of Israel.

³⁰See John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 109.

³¹ The vineyard planted by the Lord is the people of Israel (cf., e.g., Isa 5:5, Jer 2:21, Hos 10:1).

After planting and making available for the vineyard's accomplishment, fortifying gifted employees, the owner travelled and left them to their work. The owner had delegated these men to care for the vineyard and completely anticipated them to be industrious in their toil. The Lord had called and prepared men to care for Israel, predominantly for their spiritual needs. He anticipated that these men to use their aptitudes to guarantee prosperity for Israel. Jesus revealed the insubordination and disorder that emerged from the owner's absenteeism. During harvest, the owner sent a delegation to receive his share of the harvest. They were expected to deliver a certain percentage of the richness to the owner. This fashioned bitterness toward the owner. Those who laboured within the vineyard felt aggrieved being answerable to the owner and didn't want to accord him respect with a share of the harvest. They desired to devour the fruitage as it delighted them.

Activities of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard

The importance of this line of reasoning will become noticeable when we look at the role of the tenants in the Parable³². As the owner repeatedly reached out to deal with those who leased his vineyard, he repeatedly sent servants to collect his percentage of the harvest.

³² Ched Myers construed that the murderous tenants are the Sanhedrin who have betrayed their responsibility as custodians of God's chosen people. Instead of working for the owner of the vineyard (God), the Sanhedrin have solidly struggled for their own benefits even to the point of whipping and murdering servants sent by the owner of the vineyard. This disloyalty ends in the killing of the son of the vineyard owner which refers to Jesus Christologically as it relates to Mark's passion narrative. In so doing, Myers constrains his construal of this parable to a political critique of the rulers of Israel (*Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000], 309).

Owing to their antipathy toward the owner's authority, they disgracefully manhandled each servant sent to them. Some were whipped and injured, while others were killed. Undoubtedly, Jesus divulged a setup that had been recurrent throughout Israel's history. Those whom God sent to lead Israel spiritually and warn them of their sin were not revered or acknowledged. Many were ill-treated and some were slaughtered.

The researcher uncovered that the underlined treatment of the servants was repetitive time and again. Each time the owner sent a servant into the vineyard, he was repudiated and beaten. Those who leased the vineyard repeatedly disallowed the servants sent by the owner. This portrayed the endurance and grace of the owner. Regularly, he had sent servants, and they were all victimized and harmed, yet he went ahead to send servants unto the vineyard devotedly. Israel rebelled against God for centuries and yet He continued to send prophets and others to warn of their sin and challenge them to return unto the Lord. Through it all, God remained gracious and patient with Israel.

The Only Beloved Son of the Owner

The reference to the son is conceivably the most problematic component of the Parable for many transcribers to agree to take. It is this component that sticks so flawlessly with the opinion after Easter, that one can barely ignore a community derivation³³. N.T. Wright presents a naive explication of the narrative of the Parable as it is having the son deteriorates in his assignment to get the tenants to submit and the story concludes with the son having died a failure³⁴. This

³³ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:178.

³⁴ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 75-76.

assertion is unbiblical. Although the reference to resurrection is omitted in the episode, it is implied as confirmed by the researcher that in his Second Coming to judge the wicked husbandmen entails he resurrected so his mission was not a failure after all as Wright put it.

Undoubtedly, the insertion of the citation from Psalm 118 about the rejected stone lessens some of the stiffness of the son dead and failing in his task. It is included in every extant version of the Parable including GThom 65-66. Another view showcases that the Parable, as it stands, presumes an explicitly Christian confession that the Messiah is the 'son of God'.³⁵ Jesus foretells His own death at the hands of the Jews, just as they had persecuted and slain the prophets for centuries. He then asks the leaders about the right way to handle those who killed the servants. He wants them to condemn themselves by their own mouths and understand the justice of their coming penalty. They had the free will to change their minds, but pride caused them to hate Christ all the more.

Jesus, who represents the son, critiqued the conventional religious authorities, anticipated suffering to come on himself and his supporters, and proclaimed coming judgment is accurately what people would believably imagine³⁶. That Jesus viewed himself in the prophetic tradition³⁷ is generally acknowledged³⁸. That Jesus anticipated suffering and

rebuff for his followers³⁹ and hence he would suffer martyrdom in Jerusalem as part of the prophetic office,⁴⁰ is totally conceivable.

Digging down memory lane, the researcher went out of his comfort zone to exegete the text within its context by underpinning Myers's view, which underlines the authenticity of his general political reading of Mark's gospel and construes the Parable of the Wicked Tenants as Jesus's critique of Israel's leaders⁴¹. Myers argues that this parable is the central political parable that captures the essence of Jesus's ministry. Myers's analysis detects the murderous tenants of the Sanhedrin who have betrayed their obligation as custodians of God's chosen people⁴².

The owner of the vineyard sent his only son to manage the business of the vineyard and gather his portion of the harvest. He believed those who had leased the vineyard would honour and respect his son. Rather than granting him an audience, they killed him as well, like others who treaded the same part in the

³⁹ E.g., Mk. 13:9-13; Matt. 10:16-39. See further, Dunn, Jesus, 417-20.

⁴⁰ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology; The Proclamation of Jesus* Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 280; Dunn, Jesus, 796-805; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 429-30.

⁴¹ See Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*.

⁴² Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 309; Rather than working for the owner of the vineyard (God), the Sanhedrin have only concentrated on their own safeties even to the extent of whipping and murdering servants sent by the owner of the vineyard. This betrayal climaxes in the killing of the son of the vineyard owner whom Myers recognizes as Jesus. Without additional particularizing on what this ultimate proof of identity of the son with Jesus means Christologically, or how it relates to Mark's passion narrative, Myers is gratified to border his clarification of this parable to a political analysis of the rulers of Israel.

³⁵ Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 67.

³⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 412-25.

³⁷ E.g., Mark 6:4/Matt. 13:57/Luke 4:24/GThom 31; Luke 13:31-33; cf. Matt. 23:29-36/Luke 11:47-51 and Matt. 23:37-39/Luke 13:34-35.

³⁸ Dunn, Jesus, 660-64; Wright, Jesus, 162-68.

name of the owner. Having killed the son, they threw him out of the vineyard. Those who laboured in the vineyard rejected the son, and by implication, rejected the owner. Jesus articulated predictively of proceedings that would soon become apparent in Jerusalem. The only Son of the Owner of the vineyard had come and Israel would reject Him. He would die upon the cross for their sin, but the nation of Israel as a whole would deny Him as the Christ, and He would be cast out of the vineyard as a false bandit or terrorist.

Amid controversial inquiries is the actual citation that brings the parable to its logical conclusion, wherein Jesus cites Psalm 118:22 (LXX 117); The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. For years, the scholarly agreement held that this citation is neither authentic to the parable nor articulated by Jesus but a subsequent appendix or redaction by the early church⁴³. Even though more than a few biblical critics have acknowledged arguments against this default opinion, a new and full evaluation of the proof in support of the citation's genuineness is due. Furthermore, the context used to evaluate this specific instance demonstrates how any approach to settling comparable hitches should integrate facts from three areas: the full exegetical information of the passages in question, the literary tradition updating the construal of the addressees, and the first-century milieu.

The Judgement of the Vineyard's Owner

The parable ends with the verdict over the wicked tenants: "He will come, put the tenants to death, and give the vineyard to others" (Mk 12:9). This parallels

the Second Coming of Jesus and the Last Judgment. This is the answer that the chief priest, the scribes and the elders responded to Jesus' question: "What then will the owner of the vineyard do?" Captivatingly, Puig i Tàrrach upholds that it is the owner who asks a rhetorical question and answers it as well⁴⁴. The chief priests, the scribes and the elders leave after realizing that the parable was addressed to them, which marks the end of the pericope⁴⁵(Mk 12:12). Snodgrass harmonizes that this parable is a juridical parable, demonstrated after Isaiah's juridical parable, or song, of the vineyard (Isa 5:1-7), which declares judgement against the ruling priests of Jerusalem⁴⁶. Jesus finally revealed the penalties concerning the rejection of the Son. Israel would suffer for their rejection of Him. Certainly, He had summoned the curiosity of some who overheard this parable. He threw a thoughtful question at them. How would the lord of the vineyard react to such handling of his son? Assuredly, they grasped that such conduct would lead to distressing penalties.

Jesus revealed the punishment the husbandmen would take owing to their handling of the owner's son. He would come and terminate the husbandmen, those whom he had entrusted with the custody of the vineyard, and hand over the vineyard to others. Israel would reject Jesus as the Christ and it would attract a devastating punishment. They continue to be God's chosen people, and He will regather them in the end times, but the Gospel was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles to share all over the world. They had rejected Christ and God would take the Good

⁴³ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC 35c; Dallas: Word, 1993), 949. See also Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 62.

⁴⁴ Armand Puig i Tàrrach, *The Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard*, 108.

⁴⁵ Compare with Snodgrass, "Recent Research," 191.

⁴⁶ Compare with Snodgrass, "Recent Research," 187.

News to a different people, entrusting them to labour within the vineyard.

In controversial inquiries, it is the actual citation that brings the parable to its logical conclusion, wherein Jesus cites Psalm 118:22 (LXX 117); the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. For years, the scholarly agreement held that this citation is neither authentic to the parable nor articulated by Jesus but a subsequent appendix or redaction by the early church⁴⁷.

Jesus dialogued unswervingly with the chief priests and scribes, those who should have known and accepted Him as the Christ. He was the Cornerstone that the Scriptures foretold would be rejected. Having rejected Jesus, they had rejected Christ, their promised Messiah, the Cornerstone of the faith. Their rejection of Christ would attract severe punishment, both spiritually and nationally, for Israel. This applied explicitly to Israel at that time but this reality applies to all people.

Nigerian Experience of Wicked Tenants in a Socio-Political Context

The parable of the wicked tenants offers a striking allegory for the socio-political dynamics that define Nigeria's current state. At the core of this comparison

is the theme of exploitation, where those entrusted with stewardship betray their responsibilities, mirroring the actions of tenants in the vineyard. In Nigeria, this betrayal manifests through the pervasive corruption and misallocation of resources by political elites, who prioritise personal enrichment over national development.

The vineyard, representing the nation's abundant natural and human resources, has been systematically pillaged by a select few, leaving the majority to endure the consequences of neglect and deprivation. Scholars such as Chinua Achebe have long critiqued this phenomenon, describing it as a "failure of leadership" that perpetuates cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement⁴⁸. Just as the tenants' greed led to the vineyard's ruin, Nigeria's leaders' exploitation has stifled progress and deepened inequality.

Nigeria's contemporary socio-political and economic landscape is marked by profound challenges that mirror the themes of betrayal, exploitation, and rebellion encapsulated in the parable of the wicked tenants⁴⁹. At the heart of these challenges lies a

⁴⁷ Despite the fact, more than a few biblical critics have acknowledged arguments against this default opinion, a new and full evaluation of the proof in support of the citation's genuineness is due. Furthermore, the context used to evaluate this specific instance demonstrates how any approach to settling comparable hitches should integrate facts from three areas: the full exegetical information of the passages in question, the literary tradition updating the construal of the addressees, and the first-century milieu. See John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 949. See also Snodgrass, *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* 62.

⁴⁸See Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Enugu: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 1; Nigeria as a failed vineyard, the parable, though spoken in the first-century context, has enduring relevance for leadership and systems of power. It reveals the dangers of abusing divine trust, silencing truth-bearers, and resisting accountability. The study argues, the parable highlights a "theology of accountability" a warning that stewardship without faithfulness leads to judgment. The moral failure of the tenants can be applied not only to religious leaders but also to political leaders and societal elites who act with impunity, suppress dissent, and neglect the welfare of the people.

⁴⁹In the Nigerian context, the parable takes on added significance. Nigeria's abundant natural resources, often likened to the vineyard, have been exploited by leaders who prioritize personal gain over the common good. The rejection of the son in the parable mirrors

pervasive culture of corruption, which has systematically undermined governance and eroded public trust. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt nations globally, reflecting the entrenched nature of graft at all levels of society. From embezzlement of public funds to bribery and nepotism, corruption has siphoned resources away from critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, exacerbating poverty and inequality⁵⁰. This mismanagement of national wealth echoes the tenants' abuse of the vineyard, as leaders entrusted with stewardship exploit their positions for personal gain, leaving the populace to bear the brunt of systemic failures.

According to Inyaregh, increasing insecurity in Nigeria appears to be firming up autonomy movements across the country, and different cultural nationalities are absolutely agitating for self-government, threatening the corporate subsistence of the state⁵¹. To collaborate on this assertion, Okolo and Akpokighe dictate that the core cause of Nigeria's hindrance to making progress is attested convincingly that those in government are just thieving public funds. Corruption in Nigeria is not the restricted preserve of politicians, civil servants, and captains of

the betrayal of democratic ideals and the marginalization of the masses by those in power. By examining the parable through this lens, this study seeks to highlight its potential to inspire transformative change, offering a moral and ethical framework for addressing Nigeria's socio-political challenges.

⁵⁰ D. Smith, Corruption and Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Public Administration*, 25 no. 2 (2018): 178-194.

⁵¹ Abel Aor Inyaregh, "A Call for Restructuring in Acts 6.1-8: A Challenge in a Post-Colonial, Multi-Ethno-religious Nigerian Society" *Veritas Journal of Humanities* Vol. 4, no. 1 & 2, (2022): 57.

industry. Among the "common people," there is an instinctive honing of stealing skills. One should stop thinking that people suddenly become corrupt when they join the government. However, having been tutored and mentored on petty stealing from probably the age of five, Nigerians naturally explode when they occupy positions of authority at any level, either in the private or public sector. They join the trend of egotistic leaders after abruptly finding themselves at the helm of affairs. Instead of using their positions to address their ills, they adapt to the enrichment enthusiasm. Moreover, corruption is demarcated as the engrossment in unlawful, deceitful, or wicked conduct that is detrimental to the moral fabric of society⁵².

Natufe observed corruption as a chief stumbling block to good governance and development. Corruption is both a symptom and a consequence of poverty⁵³. Corruption breeds poverty and poverty helps corruption to grow consistently⁵⁴ identifying avarice, greed and get-rich-quick syndrome as major causes of political corruption in Nigeria. He concluded that corruption affects the welfare of individuals and retards the progress of the state. He stated that acts of corruption by political leaders include embezzlement of public funds, rigging of elections, kidnapping of political opponents, thuggery and politically

⁵² Philips O. Okolo & Raymond Akpokighe Okimute, "Corruption in Nigeria: The Possible Way Out" *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science* Volume 14 Issue 7; no. 33 (2014), Niger Delta University, Nigeria.

⁵³ O. I. Natufe, Governance and politics in Nigeria. Retrieved on Sept 20, 2007 from <http://www.dawodu.com>

⁵⁴ D.O. Orji, The Role of the Churches in Combating Corruption among Political Leaders in Anambra State, Nigeria. *An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis of the Faculty of Social Sciences*. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2011.

VERITAS JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1, JUNE 2025

motivated killings. Looking at this from a different angle, Inyaregh underscores that religious tension, conflict and violence in Nigeria have uninterruptedly been prompted by the thoughtful stimulus of some powerful leaders such as the implementation of Sharia Law and the unsupported membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference by Nigeria (December 1985/January 1986) under the then Head of State, General Badamosi Babangida⁵⁵.

Political Corruption occurs when a public official attempts to gain something by abusing power. However, different techniques of corruption have been identified among Nigerian leaders as bribery with its Nigerian variants, kickbacks; nepotism; misappropriation of funds; the use of contrived security threats to the state or the allocation for personal enrichment of public officers charged with the maintenance of public order; the exploitation of privileged relationship with key public sector managers to acquire competitive business assets; auto-corruption; extortion; and employment patronage⁵⁶. As stated by Inyaregh, in Nigeria, there is a huge lacuna between the rich and the poor. Nigerian politicians find themselves in a robust position of power and wealth due to their domination in the oil and gas industries in Nigeria. Many politicians own shares in these industries, tax revenues from the energy sector are concentrated, and the profits of Nigeria's energy are not squarely distributed in the country⁵⁷.

The researchers attest that the struggle for resources, otherwise known as the sharing of the national cake in Nigeria's political phraseology, has taken a debilitating dimension, permitting all forms of corruption. Every political issue is tied to who gets what, when and how much. The idea that the "national cake" is meant to be shared rather than baked by the various ethnic groups that constitute the Nigerian federation provides a fertile ground for the kleptomaniac elite who are obsessed with siphoning public funds. Government officials use and abuse their hold on power to extract from the private sector, government revenues and the economy at large. Examples include extraction, embezzlement, rent-seeking, plunder and even Kleptocracy (rule by thieves)⁵⁸. What unites a nation comprises those things set up in the political system that boost common understanding among the federating units through the constitutionally prearranged resource allocation formula and income redistribution plans among states. In addition, the federal character principles in the distribution and allocation of public appointments so as to clarify tribalism, ethnic chauvinism and religious bigotry among other

⁵⁸The mass protests to end the Special Anti-Robbery Squad known as the #EndSARS protests was a decentralized social movement and series of mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria. The protest started in 2017 as a Twitter campaign using the #ENDSARS to demand the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The protests were just the avenues the Nigerian youths got to vent their frustration, disappointment and anger with the government. The paper asserts that nepotism, tribalism, insecurity and corruption are the underlying issues that fuelled the protest. Restructuring and resource control, which underline the gross inequality in Nigeria, are other current debates that gave rise to the protests. Following the analysis, the study attests that nepotism, tribalism, insecurity and corruption are the clog in the wheels of Nigeria's economic, political and social development.

⁵⁵Inyaregh, *A Call for Restructuring in Acts*, 55.

⁵⁶ Okolo & Okimute 'Corruption in Nigeria'.

⁵⁷ Abel Aor Inyaregh, "The Rich Fools in Nigerian Society: An Exegetical Study in Luke 12.16-21" *Crowther Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 1, no. 3, (July, 2024): 57.

dividing vices in the country⁵⁹. Considering these stuff that slowed down the country had been dented by the succession of corrupt practices by both state and non-state officials for a long time in the country since the independence era hitherto.

These crises had moreover transformed into other variants of crises such as Banditry and Kidnapping adventures. The unceasing or undiminished crises are similarly revitalization of other State settled crises for instance the Niger Delta Militancy which was granted amnesty in the South East and South-South part of the country amid other corrupt acts⁶⁰. Without a doubt, these are tensions in the country threatening the survival of the political entity.

Before now, Nigeria has seen the insurgence of conflicts and acts of terrorism that many scholars have occasionally viewed as a protest against unfair circulation of resources, corruption, injustice, and gross alienation⁶¹. Inyaregh disclosed this ugly scenario that, ethnicity has destroyed justice because it permeates the national awareness, as well as the accessibility of public offices, well-being, and support such that, whenever someone is given a post in public office it turns into an obligatory prospect for his or

her ethnic group to have the right to the nation's wealth, or national cake⁶².

Owing to poor methods of handling these protests, they deteriorate into social vices that affect the country destructively⁶³. Instances of Boko haram, bandits, and other ethnic-based militias erupted as protests but the inefficient handling of the government radicalized them into what they have turned out to be nowadays. The 2020 youth-led social movement for good governance in Nigeria⁶⁴ spread across the 36 states of the country and other African countries as well as the United Kingdom.

The search for good governance and ending police brutality pushed the Nigerian youth to engage in the EndSARS⁶⁵ protest as a medium to demand better governance and to improve the political and economic

⁵⁹ O.I. Aluko, "Political Culture of Violence in Developing Democracies". *Journal Studies in Politics and Society*, Vol.7 no. 9 (2019): 139.

⁶⁰ O.I. Aluko, "Breaking the Cycle of Corruption in Nigeria: The Myth and Reality". *Journal of Co-operative and Business Studies (JCBS)* Vol.5, no. 1(2020): 121.

⁶¹ J. Mamokhere, An Assessment of Reasons behind Service Delivery Protests: A Case of Greater Tzaneen municipality. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20 no. 2 (2020), e2049. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2049>; S.A. Power, the Deprivation-Protest Paradox: How the Perception of Unfair Economic Inequality leads to Civic Unrest. *Current Anthropology*, 59 no. 6 (2018): 765-789.

⁶² Inyaregh, *A Call for Restructuring in Acts*, 54.

⁶³ D.O. Alao, C.O. Atere, & O. Alao, Boko-Haram insurgence in Nigeria: The challenges and lessons. *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies*, 1 no. 4 (2012): 1-15.

⁶⁴ Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with approximately 240 million people, the largest African economy, the largest oil producer, and the most ethnically diverse, with over 250 ethnics and 350 linguistic groups (World Bank, 2018; 2019; 2020).

⁶⁵ Nigeria's democratisation is endangered because the security and welfare of ordinary citizens is being threatened by general deficiency, alienation, poverty and the sick economy fired by maladministration, unskillfulness and dearth of accountability. Apparently, all these factors refute the development of such fundamentals of the democratic ethos as frankness, wide consultation and wealth creation. EndSars was birthed by gross human rights violations and sheer indifference for human life. It is only rational that upcoming policies open doors for active human rights protection to address the many problems the campaign has emphasized.

outlook of the country as well as resuscitate the dwindling revenue from the crude oil⁶⁶.

Evidence exists concerning food crises leading to chaos and even revolutions, which weaken national security. Historical proof exists that establishes a connection between higher food prices and ferocious uprisings. This connection was quite obvious during the global food crisis of 2007/2008 when the then record-high food prices provoked uprisings across numerous countries in different parts of the world, regardless of the form of government in action⁶⁷. In Nigeria, food insecurity has deteriorated to national insecurity because of prolonged armed skirmishes concerning different groups, particularly the Boko Haram group and Fulani herders. The actions of these clusters concerning the invasion and destruction of agrarian communities have caused numerous civilian deaths, consequently generating severe insecurity.

⁶⁶ U. Orizu, How Nigerian youths failed to utilize opportunities of EndSARS protests, *This Day Newspaper*; 2021, October 18; It is evident that civil disobedience and protests around the world are geared towards a petition for a better quality of life. Nigeria's 2020 EndSARS protest was the largest in the history of the country. The protest was pitched toward the necessity to bring about noteworthy transformation in governance and people-oriented policies. Nevertheless, the government's approach to handling the protest has been largely disapproved with the disposition of the army and police which gave rise to the killing of some protesters. More so, Odua agitations in the South West and Biafran agitations in the South East are the revolutionary movements birthing chaos because of bad and corrupt governance in Nigeria.

⁶⁷ M. Notaras, Food insecurity and the conflict trap. Our World. Retrieved from <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/food-insecurity-and-the-conflict-trap, 2011, August 31>; J. Berazneva & D. R. Lee, Explaining the African Food Riots of 2007-2008: An Empirical Analysis. *Food Policy*, 39 (2013): 28–39. doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2012.12.007.

It is apparent that Nigeria is not at war technically per se, but the bloodshed ensuing from many forms of insecurity fits the context of a conflict-ridden and at war. Conservatively, the threshold mandatory to categorise an armed conflict as a civil war is to index 1,000 battle deaths⁶⁸. Nigeria has unswervingly logged deaths beyond 1,000 from many crises unbridled by many groups across the country for decades. Both the Nigeria Security Tracker and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) projected the total number of deaths connected with the Boko Haram Terrorist group alone between June 2011 and June 2018 at 34,261 and 37,530 people⁶⁹. Besides the Boko Haram terrorists, there are other sources of vicious deaths, which consist of intracommunity conflicts, herders-farmers' conflicts, clashes between security agencies and socio-cultural and religious groups and other felonious events, particularly ransom kidnappings. In 2018 alone, there were about 10,665 mortalities from different types of violence in Nigeria, with the maximum source of violent deaths ensuing from criminal happenings, which logged 3,425 deaths in 1,191 incidents⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ K. Dupuy & S. A. Rustad, Trends in armed conflict, 1946–2017; 2018. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Dupuy%2C%20Rustad-%20Trends%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%2C%201946%E2%80%932017%2C%20Conflict%20Trends%205-2018.pdf>

⁶⁹ J. Campbell, & A. Harwood, Boko Haram's deadly impact. Council on Foreign Affairs (2018, August 20), Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/article/boko-harams-deadly-impact> CBN

⁷⁰ V. Ukoji, A. Ayodokun, & V. Eze, Nigeria watch: Eighth report on violence in Nigeria. IFRA-Nigeria Working Papers Series, No. 59/15/03/2019; 2019. Retrieved from [https://www.ifra-nigeria.org/files/55/NigeriaWatch-Project/151/UKOJI,-AYODOKUN,-EZE-\(2019\)-Nigeria-Watch-Report-on-violence-in-Nigeria.pdf](https://www.ifra-nigeria.org/files/55/NigeriaWatch-Project/151/UKOJI,-AYODOKUN,-EZE-(2019)-Nigeria-Watch-Report-on-violence-in-Nigeria.pdf)

Since 1999, when Nigeria chose the path to democratic governance, crises between the Fulani herders and farmers progressively took a different dimension, occurrence, ubiquity, intricacy and deadliness, with the traditional clash devices becoming insufficient to handle them. The deadliness of viciousness unleashed by the Fulani herders led the Institute for Economics and Peace to label them in the global terrorism index and categorise them as a terrorist group over and above tagging them as the fourth deadliest group in 2014, after having been accountable for the death of 1,229 people⁷¹. These killings have worsened since 2018 hitherto.

Since 2014, the Fulani herders have remained noxious as they took the laws into their own hands by engaging in several forms of attacks, specifically ransom kidnappings and militia expeditions against agricultural communities, measured aggressively against their herding and grazing events. What must have bolstered the epidemics of killings by the Fulani herders is the indifference of the Nigerian government despite the international cataloguing of these herders as terrorists. The spring of the impetus of the Fulani herders is connected to the open backing of their socio-cultural associations, particularly the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and Fulani Nationality Movement along with the implicit backing of the Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari. Notwithstanding the awareness of Nigerians that the presidency is protecting the herder-killers and their

promoters, the government has not done anything considerable to refute this acuity⁷². This attitude of the presidency portrayed the operation of the wicked servants, a misplaced priority of abusing the creation mandate by supporting the killings of innocent Nigerians.

The nerve of the Fulani herders could be understood in the kind of classy arms at their disposal. They use the Soviet assault rifle, Avtomat Kalashnikova (AK47). And, with these weapons, they have been unleashing fire and brimstone on agrarian communities across Nigeria unchallenged. As, between 2010 and 2013, the Fulani herders were accountable for slaughtering 80 people equated to 1,229 people they killed in 2014 alone. Fresh evaluations showed an upsetting depiction of bloodshed. It is projected that more than 10,000 persons lost their lives in the past decade from the violence unleashed by Fulani herders on agrarian communities. Out of this number, more than 6,000 persons were victims in the past two years⁷³. A further breakdown showed that fatalities ensuing conflicts between Fulani herders and agriculturalists in 2016 alone were about 2,500 persons. A comparable high trend in mortalities resulted between 2011 and 2016 when more than 2,000 deaths on average were documented⁷⁴. Updated information from the Nigeria

⁷¹ IEP (Institute for Economics and Peace). Global terrorism index 2015: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism, 2015; Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2015%20Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report_0_0.pdf

⁷² *International Crisis Group*, Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict. Africa Report No. 252.2017; Retrieved from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/252-nigerias-spreading-herder-farmerconflict.pdf>

⁷³ U. J. Ilo, I. Jonathan-Chaver & Y. Adamolekun, the deadliest conflict you've never heard of: Nigeria's cattle herders and farmers wage a resource war. *Foreign Affairs*, (2019, January 23); Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2019-01-23/deadliest-conflict-youve-never-heard>

⁷⁴ *International Crisis Group*, *Herders against farmers*.

Security Tracker recorded that the death toll from Fulani herders-farmers' conflicts in 2017 and 2018 was 1,041 and 2,037 deaths, respectively⁷⁵.

As the Fulani herders were killing many people across the country, so were the Boko Haram terrorists petrifying the northeastern region. The index of mortalities connected to the Boko Haram crisis in 2018 displayed a death toll of 2,016 persons⁷⁶. The joint result of these crises is the distraction of events required for food production, with grave effects on food security. The numerous skirmishes have likewise caused internal dislodgment. Since 2013, the events of the Boko Haram group have been accountable for the displacement of 2.4 million people and putting more than seven million people at the peril of hunger⁷⁷. Across the major states in Nigeria where the Fulani herders have caused horror, a required outcome is internal dislodgment arising from the demolition of the family fatherlands of the fatalities. Evaluations put the figure of people displaced in Nigeria's Middle Belt states of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states at over 620,000 persons⁷⁸. The effect of dislodgment on these farming peoples is that their aid to food production in the country is gone, and they are displaced and robbed of their livelihoods in farming.

⁷⁵ J. Campbell, *The numbers behind sectarian violence in Nigeria*. Council on Foreign Relations, (2018, December 20); Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/numbers-behind-sectarian-violence-nigeria#main-content>

⁷⁶ Campbell, *The numbers behind sectarian violence*.

⁷⁷ Campbell & Harwood, *Boko Haram's deadly impact*.

⁷⁸ C.M.A. Kwaja, and B.I. Ademola-Adelehin, *Responses to conflicts between farmers and herders in the middle belt of Nigeria: Mapping past efforts and opportunities for violence prevention*. Policy paper of Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria (FFARN) search for Common Ground. Accessed 3rd June, 2018.

The insinuation is the thickening of the food insecurity encountered in the country.

Looking at another dimension of the crisis, Inyaregh equated the labour of academics in Nigeria to slaves who used to work in the sugarcane plantations in America or the West Indies Islands, with their mouths taped up. They work very hard but earn less. As the Academic Union agitated for a better take-home their slave wage was halted, thereby subjecting them to inhuman treatment⁷⁹.

Conclusion

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants is a stark warning to Nigeria's ruling class: exploitative leadership invites divine and societal judgment. The nation's insecurity and social tensions mirror the vineyard's turmoil, signalling an impending revolution unless justice is restored. Nigeria stands at a crossroads will its leaders repent, or will the vineyard be given to others? Mark 12:1–12 speaks powerfully to Nigeria's current reality. Mark 12:1–12 is a theologically rich parable that critiques faithless leadership, warns of divine judgment, and announces the emergence of a new community shaped by justice and truth. Its prophetic and revolutionary tone provides a framework for analyzing societal breakdown, including Nigeria's context of insecurity, corruption, and popular discontent. As Jesus confronted the religious elite with a story of accountability, so too can this parable confront modern power structures, reminding us that God demands justice, truth, and faithful stewardship in every generation. Mark 12:1–

⁷⁹ Abel Aor Inyaregh, *Aor Abel Inyaregh Slavery in The Pauline Epistle to Philemon: "Theological, Social, And Economic Implications for Nigerian Context"*. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.11 no. 2 (2021): 19-20.

12 serves as a mirror for Nigeria's leadership failures and social fractures. The parable's emphasis on accountability and moral stewardship challenges Nigerian institutions to prioritise collective flourishing over self-interest, lest systemic collapse invite revolutionary upheaval. The Wicked Tenants parable transcends its ancient context, offering a prophetic lens through which to view Nigeria's turmoil. The failure of leadership, much like the tenants' greed, invites divine and human reckoning. Whether through reform or revolution, the parable underscores a universal truth: systems built on exploitation will collapse, making way for new custodians of justice. As Nigeria grapples with its 'vineyard,' the lesson is clear: accountability is not merely a moral duty but a societal imperative. The hope in the parable is that the vineyard is not lost; it will be given to new stewards. In Nigeria, that vision remains alive in the resilient cries for justice, youth-led movements, and emerging prophetic voices.

Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.
- Alao, D.O. Atere, C.O. & Alao, O. Boko-Haram Insurgence in Nigeria: the challenges and lessons. *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies*, 1 no. 4 (2012): 1-15.
- Aluko, O. I. "Political Culture of Violence in Developing Democracies". *Journal Studies in Politics and Society*, Vol.7 no. 9 (2019): 139.
- "Breaking the Cycle of Corruption in Nigeria: The Myth and Reality". *Journal of Cooperative and Business Studies (JCBS)* Vol.5, no. 1 (2020): 121.
- Berazneva, J. & Lee, D. R. Explaining the African Food Riots of 2007-2008: An Empirical Analysis. *Food Policy*, 39 (2013): 28-39. doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2012.12.007.
- Campbell, J. & Harwood, A. Boko Haram's deadly impact. Council on Foreign Affairs (2018, August 20), Retrieved from [https://www.cfr.org/article/boko-harams-deadly-impact CBN](https://www.cfr.org/article/boko-harams-deadly-impact-CBN)
- Campbell, J. The numbers behind sectarian violence in Nigeria. Council on Foreign Relations, (2018, December 20); Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/numbers-behind-sectarian-violence-nigeria#main-content>
- Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- Carter, Warren. *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000.
- Davies, W.D. and Allison, Dale C. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.
- *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. 3 vols. *The International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. 1997.
- De Moor, Johannes C. "The Targumic Background of Mark 12:1-12: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29 no. 1 (1998): 72.

- Dupuy, K. & Rustad, S. A. Trends in armed conflict, 1946–2017; 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Dupuy%2C%20Rustad-%20Trends%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%2C%201946%E2%80%932017%2C%20Conflict%20Trends%205-2018.pdf>
- Dunn, James D.G. *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV. AB 28A*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.
- France, R.T. *The Gospel of Matthew. NICNT*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke. NICNT*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Horsley, Richard A. *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Ilo, U. J., Jonathan-Chaver, I. & Adamolekun, Y. The Deadliest Conflict you’ve never heard of: Nigeria’s cattle herders and farmers wage a resource war. *Foreign Affairs*, (2019, January 23); retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2019-01-23/deadliest-conflict-youve-never-heard>
- Institute for Economics and Peace. Global terrorism index 2015: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism, 2015; Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2015%20Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report_0_0.pdf
- International Crisis Group, Herders against farmers: Nigeria’s expanding deadly conflict. Africa Report No. 252. 2017; Retrieved from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/252-nigerias-spreading-herder-farmerconflict.pdf>
- Inyaregh, Abel Aor. “A Call for Restructuring in Acts 6.1-8: A Challenge in a Post-Colonial, Multi-Ethno-religious Nigerian Society” *Veritas Journal of Humanities* Vol. 4, no. 1 & 2, (2022): 57.
- “Slavery in The Pauline Epistle to Philemon: Theological, Social, And Economic Implications for Nigerian Context”. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.11 no. 2 (2021): 19-20.
- “The Rich Fools in Nigerian Society: An Exegetical Study in Luke 12.16-21” *Crowther Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July, 2024): 57.
- Iverson, Kelly R. “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): 305-335.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *New Testament Theology; The Proclamation of Jesus* Vol. 1, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.
- *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954.

- Marcus, Joel. *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- Nolland, John. *Luke 18:35-24:53*. WBC 35c; Dallas: Word, 1993.
- Kloppenborg, John S. *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Secret of Jesus' Divine Sonship in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations. *JBL* 105 (1986): 643-55.
- Kwaja, C.M.A. and Ademola-Adelehin, B.I. Responses to conflicts between farmers and herders in the middle belt of Nigeria: Mapping past efforts and opportunities for violence prevention. Policy paper of Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria (FFARN) Search for Common Ground. Accessed 3rd June, 2018.
- Luz, Ulrich. *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary. Hermeneia*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Mamokhere, J. An assessment of reasons behind service delivery protests: A case of greater Tzaneen municipality. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20 no. 2 (2020).
- Mell, Ulrich. *Die "anderen" Winzer: Eine exegetische Studie zur Vollmacht Jesu Christi nach Markus 11, 27-12, 34* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994): 149-51.
- Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000.
- Natufe, O. I. Governance and politics in Nigeria. Retrieved on Sept 20, 2007; Retrieved from <http://www.dawodu.com>
- Notaras, M. Food insecurity and the conflict trap. Our World. Retrieved from <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/food-insecurity-and-the-conflict-trap>, August 31 2011.
- Orji, D.O. "The Role of the Churches in Combating Corruption among Political Leaders in Anambra State, Nigeria". *An Unpublished PhD Thesis of the Faculty of Social Sciences*. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2011.
- Okolo, Philips O. & Okimute, Raymond Akpokighe. 'Corruption in Nigeria: The Possible Way Out' *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science* Volume 14 no. 7 (2014): 33.
- Orizu, U. How Nigerian youths failed to utilise opportunities of EndSARS protests, *This Day Newspaper*; 2021, October 18.
- Power, S.A. The Deprivation-Protest Paradox: How the Perception of Unfair Economic

- Inequality Leads to Civic Unrest. *Current Anthropology*, 59 no. 6 (2018): 765-789.
- Sevrin, Jean-Marie. *Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L'Evangile selon Thomas*: EvTh 63, 64, 65; 425-39 in *Les paraboles paraboles evangeliques: Perspective nouvelles*, ed. Jean Delorme, Paris: du Cerf, 1989.
- Smith, D. Corruption and Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Public Administration*, 25 no.2 (2018): 178-194.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. "Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Assessment," *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 8 (1998): 187.
- *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*. WUNT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983.
- Stein, Robert H. *Luke. The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman. 1992.
- *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Stern, David. Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen, 42-80 in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod. New York: Paulist, 1989.
- Tàrrech, Armand Puigi. "The Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard: The Narrative Outline and Its Socio-Historical Plausibility," *Biblische Notizen* 158 (2013): 102.
- Theissen, Gerd and Merz, Annette. *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Ukoji, V. Ayodokun, A. & Eze, V. Nigeria watch: Eighth report on violence in Nigeria. IFRA-Nigeria Working Papers Series, No. 59/15/03/2019; 2019.
- Retrieved from [https://www.ifra-nigeria.org/files/55/NigeriaWatch-Project/151/UKOJI,-AYODOKUN,-EZE-\(2019\)-Nigeria-Watch-Report-on-violence-in-Nigeria.pdf](https://www.ifra-nigeria.org/files/55/NigeriaWatch-Project/151/UKOJI,-AYODOKUN,-EZE-(2019)-Nigeria-Watch-Report-on-violence-in-Nigeria.pdf)
- World Bank, 2018; 2019; 2020.
- Wright, N.T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.
- **Abel Aor Inyaregh** holds a Ph.D and is of the Department of Religion Studies, National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria. He can be reached at: abelaorinyaregh@gmail.com and <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0666-8592>
 - **Rose Yangu Iordaa** is of the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria and she can be reached at: roseiordaa@gmail.com

- **Matthew Vanen Chiangi** is of the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Mkar, Mkar, Nigeria and can be reached at: vanenmx@yahoo.co.uk and <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0494-0894>