

# The Son In The Stone

Mark 12:1-12 May 20, 2026

Don't shoot the messenger! That phrase (in one form or another) has roots all the way back in 400 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Historically, people don't usually take the advice. It's rough business being a messenger bringing unwanted news. But sometimes even *good* news leads to the death of the messenger.

In the early 13th century, the Khwarazmian Empire was a powerful kingdom spanning territory in what is now Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

A ruler from a neighboring kingdom wanted to establish peaceful trade with them. And so, the neighbor king sent a caravan of merchants with rich goods, hoping to establish a partnership. But the merchants were labeled as spies. Their goods were taken and the whole caravan was executed.

Hearing of this injustice, the neighbor king sent diplomats to try to resolve the tension. He wanted the Shah to make things right, but was still willing to live at peace, despite what they had done.

The Shah took the junior diplomats and shaved their beards, which were symbols of masculinity in their kingdom. Then he sent them back with them the severed head of the senior diplomat.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately for the Shah, the neighboring ruler he was offending was *Genghis Khan*. His response was to not send an envoy, but an army. Within two years, the Khwarazmian Empire was obliterated. Millions were dead. And the governor who originally carried out the killing of the merchants was caught and had molten metal poured into his mouth, eyes, and ears. They had killed the messengers, so Genghis made sure the whole world got the message.

All this after a mighty king had wanted to extend peace and prosperity to a neighbor!

For years Jesus shared the message of the Kingdom. It was *good* news. But the leaders of Israel rejected the message and the Messenger. Now they were conspiring how they could slay Him.

Jesus wanted everyone in Israel and everyone after to understand exactly what was going on. And so, just days before His crucifixion, He told a vivid story of wicked fools who killed the messengers.

**Mark 12:1 - <sup>1</sup> He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away.**

It's important to identify what different elements symbolize in parables. We need to be careful not to be overly specific with every single thing we see. Usually parables are meant to deliver a distilled

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<sup>1</sup> David Frank *The Classical Origins And Modern Expressions Of "Don't Shoot The Messenger"* Cambridge University Press

<sup>2</sup> <https://bigthinkmedia.substack.com/p/the-insult-that-sparked-genghis-khan>

spiritual truth. So, for example, we shouldn't find some allegorical meaning for the "digging" of the winepress.

But we can identify several key figures in this story. The tenant farmers will be identified as the unbelieving leaders of Israel - specifically those contending against Jesus right then in the temple, but also extending to all the rebellious leaders of the nation throughout her history.

The vineyard is Israel. God used this illustration many times in the Old Testament. Psalm 80, Isaiah 27, Jeremiah 2, Ezekiel 19, Hosea 10. Those listening would understand this connection. Imagine if I started telling us a story where a bald eagle flies over a field full of amber waves of grain.

That means that the land owner refers to God. You see, in Isaiah 5 there is a song. A tender love song about how God planted a vineyard - Israel. How He dug a winepress there and built a tower in it and a hedge around it. Jesus is quoting from this song.<sup>3</sup> And the Jews would've known that this love song is a sad one. It's about the failure of the vineyard and the judgment that followed.

Look at all this landowner did. He didn't just plant a vine or two. This is a major undertaking. A great investment of time and effort and wealth to create this vineyard.

The fence would've been made of unmortared stones. Rock after rock carried and placed. The owner installed equipment and facilities necessary not just to grow plants, but to generate products like wine for use and sale. The tower was not only a lookout post, but it would also be a place they could store the crop<sup>4</sup> and it would provide a place for the people working the vineyard to live in.<sup>5</sup>

We're given the impression that the land owner does it all himself. He set this vineyard up for protection, for production, for preservation, and to give a *place* to those who wanted to partner with him. He opens the vineyard up to lease to others who want to work there and he supplies all they need for a profitable, long-term partnership.

**Mark 12:2 - <sup>2</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard from them.**

It would usually take a vineyard 4 or 5 years to produce at commercial levels.<sup>6</sup> But the landowner is patient. As we continue through the story, notice the *patience* of God. He's almost *too* patient!

The landowner sending this servant to collect was very normal. In fact, that was the prevailing way things were done at the time.<sup>7</sup> A *portion* of the crop would be sent back to the owner as rent.

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<sup>3</sup> David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

<sup>4</sup> John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

<sup>5</sup> Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Second Edition)*

<sup>6</sup> R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

<sup>7</sup> Walter Wessel *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

But the *rest* of the fruit was for the farmers. Theirs for eating and enjoyment and enrichment. The land owner was *happy* to have them benefit from *his* hard work and *his* great wealth.

He sent his servant to collect different types of wine, including as one scholar notes, “a cheap wine designated for the slaves to the state.”<sup>8</sup> So, the owner isn’t just hoarding the proceeds totally for himself - *even though it all belongs to him!* But he’s then taking from *his* profits to bless others. *That’s* the kind of Master God is. Full of patience. Full of generosity. Full of care and kindness. Inviting us to be a part of His incredible, life-changing work.

**Mark 12:3-5 - <sup>3</sup> But they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent another servant to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup> Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; some they beat, and others they killed.**

God said this in Jeremiah 7:

**Jeremiah 7:25 - <sup>25</sup> Since the day your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until today, I have sent all my servants the prophets to you time and time again.**

That’s who the servants are in this parable. But God’s people wouldn’t listen. As Stephen said in his famous sermon, “Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?”<sup>9</sup>

The farmers had so much. They could’ve had a vibrant life of purpose and provision and participation in this great landowner’s estate. Instead, they produced only rebellion and violence.

In Hosea 10, God says, “Israel is a lush vine; it yields fruit for itself. The more his fruit increased, the more he increased the altars.”

*Despite* the evil things these famers were doing, the master is *still* patient. Did you notice? “He also sent *many* others.” Even though how wicked the farmers were. When it says they beat some, the term is sometimes used when speaking of literally flaying someone’s skin off.<sup>10</sup>

Why would God allow it? Why not just bring the hammer down after the *first* rebellion? In other words: Why was God so patient and merciful to these men who deserved death?

Because the Lord is gracious and compassionate. *Slow* to anger and abounding in hesed love.<sup>11</sup>

Friends, we may not have killed any prophets, but our sins deserve death, too. It is through the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.<sup>12</sup> We were at war with God, hostile against Him, and

<sup>8</sup> William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

<sup>9</sup> Acts 7:52

<sup>10</sup> Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 103:8

<sup>12</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23

unwilling to submit.<sup>13</sup> But Jesus extends us mercy. He extends us grace because He loves us. *That's* why He is patient. He renews His mercy every morning. Because He's not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance.

And that means, at times, He allows His servants to suffer. Because how can the wicked be saved unless they repent? And how can they repent unless they believe? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?<sup>14</sup>

We are the messengers that carry the message. It demands boldness and fearlessness and selflessness, putting the call above our own desires, understanding that the world *may* hate and reject us the way Christ was hated and rejected, but carrying the message wherever we're sent.

**Mark 12:6 - <sup>6</sup> He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'**

God is not naive. He knew exactly what would happen when He sent His Son to earth. But He is hopeful. He *wants* people to repent and reconcile. To lay their weapons down in surrender. This group of farmers *already* deserved death. But the Master is merciful.

**Mark 12:7-8 - <sup>7</sup> But those tenant farmers said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup> So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.**

This is absolute folly. Maybe these guys convinced themselves that they had killed all the servants and that, hopefully the owner was dead, too, so if they kill the son, there's no one left.<sup>15</sup>

The point here is that the tenant farmers are being presented as wicked and stupid to an insane degree.<sup>16</sup> Jesus does so to highlight *how insane* it is to reject God's compassionate and generous offer of peace. "Come to Me," He says, "And I will give you rest. I will give you peace. I will give you eternal life. I will forgive you and cleanse you and empower you and make you a *new creation*."

Instead, many people reject the Son. They dishonor and insult the Lord of glory. In the parable, the farmers murder the son and desecrate his corpse, denying him even a proper burial. This was the ultimate insult in the ancient world.<sup>17</sup> But the son was the *final offer* of peace from the master.

**Mark 12:9 - <sup>9</sup> What then will the owner, of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the farmers and give the vineyard to others.**

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:7

<sup>14</sup> Romans 10:14-15

<sup>15</sup> BKC

<sup>16</sup> Keener

<sup>17</sup> James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

For all their previous ability to resist the servants, once the owner comes, there's not even any record of resistance. When *he* arrives, the *only* result is death. There's no fight, only judgment.

Who are the *others*? You and me! Paul told the Jews that Jesus is Messiah. When they resisted and blasphemed, Paul said, "Your blood is on your own heads! From now on I will go to the Gentiles."<sup>18</sup>

To close out His message, Jesus quickly pivots to a second metaphor in verses 10 and 11.

**Mark 12:10-11 - <sup>10</sup> Haven't you read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. <sup>11</sup> This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?"**

Jesus ties His parable of wicked farmers killing the son to this Scripture about the builders rejecting the cornerstone. The Son is the stone. Not only had they *read* it, *this* was one of the Psalms they all sang *every year at Passover* - the feast they're celebrate *that very week*. For *centuries* they had been repeating these words. Now here's Jesus saying, "You're the rejecters and *I* am the cornerstone."

This was controversial, not only because it condemns the leaders, but Jews thought that the *stone* being rejected was the *nation* of Israel and that the builders were the *other* nations of the world.<sup>19</sup>

But now Jesus reveals that *He* is the cornerstone. Which means that *He* is the new temple.<sup>20</sup> It is a broadside against the Levitical system, which was coming to an end. The veil would be torn so that *all of us* could have access to the Father and be blessed by His generosity and grace.

How did the farmers/builders/religious leaders feel about it?

**Mark 12:12 - <sup>12</sup> They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. So they left him and went away.**

Ah, so they *did* understand on one level. And here they *live out* the very parable they're angry about. They go out to conspire how to kill the Son. I wonder if the irony was lost on them.

When Genghis Khan swept through the Khwarazmian Empire, there *were* cities who surrendered. Sadly, *Genghis'* son was nothing like the Son of God. One city surrendered and were promised mercy. When they opened the gates, the people were slaughtered. One ancient historian says, "It was a memorable day for weeping and wailing." 700,000 people died that day.<sup>21</sup>

When we surrender to the Son of God, He not only spares our lives, He *ransoms* our lives. He brings us *into* His Kingdom as citizens and partners. He frees us. He equips us. He assigns us. He sends us. He grows harvest after harvest in our lives. He becomes the cornerstone of our lives, our families, our communities. Name another King like this!

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 18:5-6

<sup>19</sup> Brooks

<sup>20</sup> Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege\\_of\\_Merv\\_\(1221\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Merv_(1221))