Abstract
This paper examines the parable of the tenants in the gospel of Mark (12:1-2) from the perspective of narrative and social scientific criticism respectively, with the purpose of comparatively analysing the strengths and weaknesses of these methods of biblical interpretation. This study explores the exegetical issues associated with a plurality of interpretations proffered by the attendant scholarship on the parable of the tenants, prior to a close examination of the text in narrative and social contexts. It is argued that although the methodological approaches to the text focus on different aspects of the parable their interpretations point to the same conclusion from alternative points of view.
The Parable of the Tenants and Plurality of Interpretation

Introduction

The parable of the tenants in the gospel of Mark (Mark 12:1-12) excites hermeneutical interests for several reasons. While uniquely placed as the only major parable discourse beyond the fourth chapter in the narrative structure\(^1\) and functioning as the final catalyst for the arrest of Jesus (Mark 12:12; 13:1-2) and source of the chief priests interrogation concerning his identity (Mark 14:61-63)\(^2\), perhaps what is most perplexing is the plurality of interpretations this text elicits. Both Iverson and Snodgrass agree that this parable is among the most difficult, debated and misunderstood texts in the synoptic tradition.\(^3\) The diversity of methodological and ideological opinion illuminates the candidature of the text for a comparative analysis of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of narratological and social-scientific approaches toward biblical interpretation. This essay explores in brief the exegetical issues relative to the parable of the tenants and then by application of narrative and social scientific criticism discusses how each of these methods asks different analytical questions and observes different characteristics of the text.\(^4\) The findings point not to a diametrical opposition of methods but regard for the literary, historical and theological layers of meaning within a sacred text.\(^5\)

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