

# “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”

(By Jeremiah Cox)



***“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.” (1 Peter 2:4-8)***

It was God’s desire – therefore, the apostle Peter’s desire – that those “who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (v. 10) would grow. It is the desire of every parent to see their child grow, and such desire is no different with our spiritual Father. To grow, they would first need to lay aside the evils which characterized their former man (v. 1). Then, as does the newborn babe, they would need to “desire the pure milk of the word, that [they] may grow thereby” (v. 2). Desiring the “pure milk of the word” is one and the same as “coming to Him” (v. 4). The longing for the milk of the word was a taste which grew from their initial tasting of the Lord (v. 3). Indeed, He is gracious, and “those who were...enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:4-5) should desire more. They tasted the graciousness of the Lord when they were begotten again to a living hope (1:3) – born again through the word of God (1:23). It was in their obedient faith produced by the word that they reached “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1:19). They were poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity, but their bodies were washed with pure water; their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (cf. Hebrews 10:22) – “but are now the people of God.” The “living stone” had made them

“living stones,” and they could approach Him in utmost confidence. They were to let Him have His way with them, and He was to build them up into a “spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5). These people, who were once not a people, were now the very stones which made up the spiritual house, the household of God. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33).

Perhaps even more impressive than the blessedness of the one who has come to Christ is the hardness of heart of the one who has rejected Him – He was “rejected indeed by men.” This tragedy is described in powerful language by the apostle as he utilized the very words of the prophets before him who had “inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come” (1:10). Within the words of Isaiah and the psalmist, both the “goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22) are set on full display.

***“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’” (v. 6)***

In 2 Samuel 7, David sought to build a house for the Lord. Nathan the prophet bade him to do so, saying, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you” (v. 3). But the prophet received no such instruction from the Lord.

Jehovah’s plans were different – “Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house” (v. 11b). David’s progeny would boast of a royal dynasty. The Lord explained, “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (vv. 12-13). Directly, the Lord spoke concerning the son of David, Solomon. He would reign after his father David, and would build a physical structure for the dwelling of God (cf. Acts 7:44-47). The seed of David would continue to sit on the throne – “And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (v. 16).

Yet, such a dominant and lasting – “forever” – kingdom could not be said to reference merely the succession of the kings of Judah of the house of David. The ultimate realization of the Lord’s promise looked to the kingdom of the Messiah.

Isaiah prophesied, “it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it”(Isaiah 2:2). This is that same kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar dreamt, and was troubled by. Daniel gave the interpretation – “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;

and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

Such a kingdom that would be “established forever” would of necessity require a foundation bearing the same eternal and sure qualities. Thus, Isaiah prophesied, “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily’” (Isaiah 28:16). That, in addition to its immediate context, these words look to the Messiah as the sure foundation of His own kingdom is undeniable (cf. 1 Peter 2:6). One would come which God had foreordained to be the principal stone resting as the sure foundation, and governing the entire structure of His glorious kingdom. This stone was tried, precious, and sure. For such reason, those who put their trust in Him would not “act hastily,” or “be put to shame” (1 Peter 2:6).

Malachi prophesied, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6). This “great and dreadful day of the Lord” is that of which Joel prophesied in the 2nd chapter of his inspired book – “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls” (Joel 2:31-32). The deliverance of which Joel spoke would be found in the refuge of the Lord’s kingdom, founded upon the sure cornerstone – “And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame” (1 Peter 2:6), i.e. “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This Elijah of whom Malachi prophesied would seek to turn the hearts of the people lest they be struck with a curse. He would turn them away from sin and to the “chief cornerstone,” in whom none who put their trust would be ashamed. As Isaiah put it, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ The voice said, ‘Cry out!’ And he said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever’” (Isaiah 40:3-8).

John the Baptist identified himself as this voice crying in the wilderness (cf. John 1:22-23).

Jesus also identified John as the Elijah of Malachi 4 (cf. Matthew 11:10-15). It was John who identified the chief cornerstone, that whoever believed in Him would not be put to shame – “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29).

The kingdom would be built on the One identified by John. Peter rightly said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus taught that His words were a sure foundation in which men should trust (cf. Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49). He commissioned the apostles to teach the same, saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, Paul “determined not to know anything among [the hearers of his preaching] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (3:11). The rock on which Christ would build His church was the truth of Peter’s confession – “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). It was this truth in which the audience of Peter’s epistle put their trust. They were born again of that incorruptible word of which Isaiah prophesied, and John the Baptist directed the people toward, and were therefore being built into the spiritual house of God – the eternal kingdom (cf. 1 Peter 1:22-2:5). The foundation being none other than the “chief cornerstone.” Yet, sadly, not all would believe on Him.

***“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.’” (v. 7)***

Such a kingdom promised by God was understandably highly anticipated. The Jews sought the kingdom, and were anxious for its appearance. Such eagerness is reflected in the words of the apostles shortly before the Lord’s ascension – “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

While “all nations shall flow” (Isaiah 2:2) to this kingdom, its genesis would be in the city of David with the prophesied remnant of Jehovah’s people. “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). Jesus told the apostles, “you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The kingdom would be established in Jerusalem beginning with the very people to whom God had given such vivid foresight.

At Jacob’s well early in His ministry, Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman about the life He offered, and of that which constitutes true worship. He told the mistaken woman, “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews”

(John 4:22). It was not that salvation would be offered to the Jews only, but all that made salvation possible in God proceeded from the Jewish lineage. God told Abram, "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). "And so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob (Later given the name "Israel" – Genesis 32:28), and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs" (Acts 7:8). The twelve patriarchs would have families of their own, who, by the providence of God would grow exponentially into the nation of Israel. Of his twelve sons, one was named Judah, of which tribe David was a part, on down to the Christ (cf. Matthew 1:1-17). Thus, the builders of which the Psalmist prophesied in Psalm 118 – and to which Peter referred in his quotation – were the Jews – "The stone which the builders rejected..." (Psalm 118:22a).

Of the quotation, Lenski observes:

"The first passage reads like a brief parable. There was a certain stone, and there were builders busily at work. For the kind of building they were planning they took many stones, but this particular stone they considered totally unfit." (Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament, 1 Peter 2:7)

The builders – the Jews – sought the kingdom. They awaited the glorious day of salvation of which the prophets foretold by the Spirit of God. Yet, despite their religious pride, and outward profession of love for God, they rejected the very stone which God placed as the most important in the whole structure of the kingdom – "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:22-23). The stone which they rejected was Jesus the Christ.

Jesus rebuked the obstinate Jews, saying, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life...Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:39-40, 45-47). The Scriptures they searched and studied spoke of the Messiah whom Jesus proved Himself to be. Yet, despite the clarity of Jesus' words in agreement with the prophetic writings, and the miracles, wonders, and signs through which He was attested by God (cf. Acts 2:22), the Jews rejected Him.

The problem the Jews had with Jesus was not an insufficiency of supernatural evidence supporting His claim to be the Messiah. Shortly before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Lord uttered these words, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43). The man who had already been dead four days, whose body emitted the stench of death, was brought to life. "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him" (John 11:45). Then, five days before the Passover, when a great multitude heard

Jesus was coming from Bethany to Jerusalem, they “took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The King of Israel!’” (John 12:13).

However, later Jesus was speaking to the people and said, “‘Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.’ This He said, signifying by what death He would die” (John 12:31-33). The people understood He spoke of His death, but were troubled by the thought of the Messiah condescending to such a level. “The people answered Him, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this Son of Man?’” (v. 34). “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (v. 37). No, the primary problem was not a lack of supernatural witnesses of the Lord’s claim of Messiahship, but the very words He spoke concerning the work of the Messiah.

Later, Jesus warned, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (vv. 46-48). Due to their preconceived notions, the Jews rejected the truth Jesus spoke concerning the Messiah. Thus, they rejected Jesus, the stone.

The Psalmist notes the folly in such – “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22).

But it was not that such rejection of the cornerstone was inconsequential. It was not as if they could erect a spiritual edifice on a different foundation, which may not have been as effective, but held up either way. Their rejection of the cornerstone was a decision with fatal consequences.

Once again, Lenski observes:

“This wondrous stone means everything also to any and to all who refuse to believe: their rejection is fatal to them. In the first place, God nullifies their rejection and makes this stone the corner-head; in the second place, this stone destroys them.” (Lenski’s Commentary on the New Testament, 1 Peter 2:7)

Thus, Peter continued:

“and ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.” (v. 8)

“A stone of stumbling” is not merely a stone projected in the path of a walker which causes them to stumble a few steps until they regain their balance. Neither is “a rock of offense” anything of the sort. Such imagery is one of sure and utter destruction. To gain a fuller understanding of the description, we turn to the original context.

Peter’s quote is Isaiah 8:14. The time of this prophecy is “in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah” (7:1). The Holy Spirit reveals the setting of the days of Ahaz, “Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told to the house of David, saying, ‘Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim.’ So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind” (7:1-2).

Ahaz was troubled by the threat which Syria and Israel posed to Judah. However, God told him by the prophet Isaiah not to be troubled (7:4). For, “thus says the Lord God: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass” (v. 7). God would not allow Syria and Israel to overtake Judah. This should have been enough assurance for Ahaz. Thus, the Lord God added, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (v. 9).

Despite the great assurance given by God, Ahaz believed not. Rather than trusting in Jehovah, he turned to Assyria. Ahaz wished to form an alliance with Assyria to resist the advances of Syria and Israel. However, this was against God’s wishes, which were for Ahaz to simply trust in Him.

The alliance which Ahaz made with Assyria did not nullify the Lord’s assurance that “it shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass” (7:7) concerning Syria and Israel’s attempt to overtake Judah. However, Ahaz’s lack of trust did affect his own life, and reign as king in Judah. Isaiah prophesied, “The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house – days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah” (7:17). So then, the very alliance which Ahaz thought would bring peace and assurance brought great trouble and destruction.

In Isaiah 8:11-18, God spoke to Isaiah, commanding him not to join in the conversation of a confederacy with Assyria. Instead of fearing Syria and Israel, Isaiah and the people needed to fear the Lord. To do so would be to find a place of refuge, but to refuse to do so would be to meet great destruction. The Scripture explains, “He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken” (8:14-15). A failure to trust in God, and instead trust in Assyria would not be without its consequences. It is not simply that God offered a greater protection than Assyria, rather, that God was their only place of refuge. To refuse His

protection was to be destroyed by Him, just as an animal is caught in a snare and is crushed. So it was with Ahaz and Judah.

The apostle Peter shows this passage to be Messianic as he applies it to the consequence of the builders' rejection of Jesus. Like Ahaz, they turned their trust away from the Lord and relied upon their own wisdom. The prophetic view of the Christ was unacceptable to the Jews, even though it was the very thing which served their greatest needs. When they could have treated Jesus with the reverence He deserved, sat at His feet to hear the words of life, and followed His instructions to receive the ultimate blessing of salvation from sins, they stopped their ears, and put Him to death. This was destructive to their souls.

In Matthew 21:33-39, Jesus spoke a parable about wicked vinedressers to the chief priests and Pharisees. A landowner leased his vineyard to vinedressers. When vintage-time came around, he sent some servants to collect the fruit produced by the vineyard. "And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another" (v. 35). More servants were sent, and "they did likewise to them" (v. 36). Then, trying one last time, the landowner sent his son, "saying, 'They will respect my son.'" (v. 37) However, the wicked vinedressers "cast him out of the vineyard and killed him" (v. 39).

Jesus then asked them a question, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons'" (vv. 40-41). The Jewish leaders had played right into Jesus' purposes. Like Nathan did with David, Jesus would have a "Thou art the man" moment with the Jewish leaders.

"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (vv. 42-44). Their rejection of Jesus would not simply keep them from receiving any blessing, but would utterly decimate them. It was not possible for them to merely meander around the stone which they did not care for without being harmed by it. They came up against it in blatant defiance, and were ground to powder. That which could have been their salvation became the cause of their damnation. Peter further explained, "They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed" (v. 8). In what way were they appointed to this? Was Jesus preaching to a people who could not respond favorably to His message because of God's appointment for them?



Paul explained to the Romans, “Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’” (Romans 9:31-33). Their appointment spoke not of an individual predestination, but of God’s sovereignty to choose on whom He would bestow His mercy (cf. 9:15). His plan was that of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, not of the works of the law. The Jews could have been recipients of salvation – and many were – by simply submitting to God’s plan. However, they kicked against the goads and fatally impaled their own hearts with the very gospel that was to save them. For, “he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

To reject the word of Christ is to reject Christ Himself. To reject Christ is to reject that which God has laid as the chief cornerstone. To reject the chief cornerstone is to ensure utter destruction, for “whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:44).

## Conclusion

The word of Christ is all that is contained in the New Testament. The words of the apostles are governed by the chief cornerstone (cf. Ephesians 2:20). No facet of Scripture can be approached as a matter of personal preference. Christ requires us to either accept His words by obeying them, or be destroyed by them in the day of judgment when the secrets of men’s hearts are exposed. Those who reject God’s plan of salvation do so to their own destruction (cf. Mark 16:16). Those who reject God’s plan of marriage, and His law concerning divorce do so to their own ruin (cf. Matthew 19:3-10). Those who wish to broaden the borders of fellowship which God Himself has set kill their own souls – “for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 11). The applications are endless. Whatever we say and do must be governed by the chief cornerstone – Christ (cf. Colossians 3:17). Otherwise we will surely “have [our] part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

---

---

- - - **Bro. Cox preaches for the Elm Street church of Christ in El Reno, OK** - - -  
- - - **He may be contacted via email at: [jeremiahstancox@gmail.com](mailto:jeremiahstancox@gmail.com)** - - -

---

---