

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What is a "Living Stone"?

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4–5, KJV 1900)

In our study verses, Peter refers to Jesus as a "...living stone," and he refers to us as "...lively stones." Clearly Peter intends some form of symbolic representation by the reference to stones. From a purely natural perspective, the words "Living" and "Stone" are contradictory. Scientifically, a stone consists of elements that were never part of any living thing. Thus, according to the natural relationship, to refer to a "Living stone" would be similar to a "Dark light." If it is fully dark, there is no light present; if it is a stone, it has no life. Our task as we study the various symbolism of Scripture is to probe the context and the symbol itself to discover the most likely representation. We can explore a number of Old Testament lessons that use the symbol of stone as a prophetic guidepost to Jesus, His coming and His work.

1. Although the Old Testament lesson does not specifically point to the coming of Jesus, Paul references God's kind care of His people during their wilderness wanderings. "...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:4b) We find two specific references to a rock in the Old Testament record of Israel in the wilderness between Egypt and the Land of Canaan. Both references deal with a miraculous supply of water for Israel out of a rock. (Exodus, 17th chapter and Numbers 20th chapter)
2. "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isaiah 28:16 KJVP)
3. "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isaiah 32:2 KJVP)
4. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44 KJVP) Verse 45 refers to the stone that was "...cut out of the mountain without

hands..." that would be God's instrument for both the everlasting kingdom and for the destruction of the world empires depicted in the king's dream.

We could name many other Old Testament prophecies, but these will suffice to make the point of the analogy. As we consider Jesus in the analogy of "...a living stone..." whose victory is certain, regardless of how humans regard or despise Him, these Old Testament prophecies richly direct our meditations. In all of His work for His beloved children, Jesus is as reliable as a solid rock. There is no variableness of competence or purpose in Him or in His work. (James 1:17) He is the one and only God-approved foundation for all acceptable worship. He is the one reliable object of our faith. He is our only sure hiding place that protects us from the fiery heat of trials and from the cold winters of our own unbelief. We may shudder in fear at our adversaries, but He is able to break in pieces, reduce to a pile of broken stones, the greatest and most formidable of adversaries. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect..." (Deuteronomy 32:4)

Ye also, as lively stones.... While we might use this context in a variety of ways to refute the Roman Catholic view that Peter became the "Rock" of the church for all future generations, Peter's intent is positive, not negative. We may observe two obvious points that refute this claim before moving to the specific points that Peter makes. First, Peter affirms that Jesus remains the Rock for all believers. He has not retired from that position because He arose and ascended into heaven. He continues as the Rock, so there is no place for either Peter or popes to take His place with believers on the earth. Second, the scene that Peter describes as honoring the Lord on the earth does not elevate one man to the exclusive role of Rock. He rather identifies all believers as "...lively stones." If the Lord intended to promote Peter to the exclusive position claimed for him by the Church of Rome, it seems strange that Peter, the writer of this letter, apparently knew nothing about it when he wrote the letter. He emphatically holds the Lord Jesus Christ as the abiding Rock of the church, and he expands the analogy of a "Rock" to include all believers, not in any way to claim an

exclusive role for anyone, including himself. Now let's move to the correct lesson.

Ye also, as lively stones.... After affirming the character of our solid Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter then takes the analogy to us. He focuses on three specific roles in which we, as believers in Christ, are enabled by our Rock to serve as lesser, but godly and honorable rocks in our service to our great Rock. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfills all three of these functions, leading the way and setting an example for us to follow.

1. *...are built up a spiritual house.* Although each individual child of God possesses the God-given ability to worship God, to function as a spiritual "house of worship," Peter introduces this list with the plural "Ye," not the singular "Thee." Revisit the first two verses of this letter. To whom did Peter write? He describes them as "...strangers scattered throughout..." a large region. He refers to them as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..." Although we use the word "Foreknowledge" sometimes to refer to God's omniscience, His exclusive attribute of all-knowingness, the contextual appearance of this word in the New Testament seems far more clearly to refer to God's exclusive and loving "Knowledge" of His chosen people in Christ. For example, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Romans 8:29 KJVP) If the word in this verse refers to God's attribute, we must face the obvious contradiction that God only has "omniscience" of His own chosen people, and not of all things, past, present, and future. Every errant interpretation that I've encountered of this verse blatantly ignores the personal pronoun "whom" and tries to make it "what" instead. If the verse refers to God's omniscience, advocates of the errant view must deal with their own imposed limitation onto God's omniscience. Do they believe that He only has full knowledge of people and not of things or of events? If we accept the contextual point, the New Testament's use of "Foreknowledge" has to do with God's special and eternal love for His chosen people. Peter so describes the first recipients of his letter by this word. God chose them; they didn't choose Him, and His choice of them was based on His love for them, not on foreseen goodness in them.

Peter further describes his first recipients as sanctified and covered by the blood of Christ. It is such people who are capable of

functioning as "...lively stones..." in our study passage.

2. *...an holy priesthood.* Old Testament priests were as holy as humans could be, but they were not always—or ever for that matter—altogether holy in their own person. On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest was required to bathe his body and to put on clean priestly clothes before each of the various sacrifices that He offered on that day. He was even required at the beginning of the process to make a specific offering for himself before he could offer the sacrifice for the people. (Hebrews 5:3, 9:7) The whole Book of Hebrews is written to remind New Testament believers that Jesus is our present priest and sacrifice. His work on our behalf, and fully bestowed upon us and in us, transforms us into "...an holy priesthood." Only through His work for and in us are we able to accomplish the Biblical objective of godly worship.

3. *...to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* Our access to God, our ability to offer acceptable sacrifices to God, does not come from another human. It comes from our standing in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Do not allow the first point to slip from your mind. Peter used the plural "Ye," not the singular "Thee," at the beginning of this lesson. This whole passage rightly applies to a collection of godly, blood-washed believers who gather together and focus their time and efforts together on spiritual sacrifices offered to God by our Lord Jesus Christ. I have occasionally encountered heretical teachers who were far more effective than they should have been outside the church they serve. Their common advice to their disciples, once they convert them to their heresies, is to try to influence their home church to their way of thinking. If they fail in that effort, the heretical teachers then advise their disciples to retire from the local church and simply carry on private "Home church" worship in their homes. This idea clearly contradicts Peter's inspired teaching in this lesson. The only way that we can fulfill the objective of this lesson is in a gathered assembly, not in our own private, personal worship.

As we gather *in* local church assemblies for our worship, we need to frequently revisit this lesson and to remind ourselves of our divinely assigned objective. How much energy do we invest in trying to gain disciples to ourselves? How much do we invest in trying—collectively and in godly oneness of mind and heart—to offer a spiritual sacrifice to God, a sacrifice that is only acceptable, even in our collective gathering, "...by Jesus Christ"?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor