

# Christ the Living Stone

## (1 Peter 2:4-8)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

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### I. Background

- a. In the previous messages in this expository series on **1 Peter**, we discussed how Peter taught:
  - i. Our hope and our goal is salvation (rather than any benefits or blessings we may see in this life).
  - ii. Trials come into our lives to refine our faith, similar to the way gold is refined through fire. We can rejoice since they will lead to the goal of our faith: *the salvation of our souls*.
  - iii. The prophets wrote about this salvation that we are inheriting. They were led by the Holy Spirit to reveal the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.
  - iv. The reasons we must live holy lives, which include:
    - 1. Because we serve a holy God, who had said “Be holy, for I am holy”, (holy = *set apart*) quoting from **Leviticus**.
    - 2. Out of fear of God, considering the Day of Judgment.
    - 3. In view of the high cost at which we were redeemed, the precious blood of Christ, which is so much more precious than gold or silver.
  - v. Peter then reminded us that we have been born again of incorruptible seed: the word of God, which will endure forever, by which the gospel was preached to them.
    - 1. Therefore they should lay aside all sins of the flesh and desire the “pure milk of the word”, that they may grow spiritually.

### II. Three Prophecies about Christ, the Stone

- a. Read **1 Peter 2:4-8**.
- b. Peter refers to Christians as “living stones” who are “being built up as a spiritual house”.
  - i. I think of a temple (as in **1 Kings 5-6**) or perhaps a church building that is constructed of stones.

- c. He points to Jesus, the one we are coming to, as “a living stone”. Peter points to three prophecies about Jesus, all of which present Christ as being *like a stone* in some way. He is the stone that was...
  - i. *Rejected* by men;
    - 1. **Psalm 118:22** (designated **Psalm 117:22** in the LXX), “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”
  - ii. *Chosen* by God;
    - 1. **Isaiah 28:16**, “Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect (= *chosen*), precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”
    - 2. “Elect” = “chosen” (same Greek word here by Peter and in the LXX of **Isaiah 28:16**)
  - iii. *Precious* to God; and also
    - 1. The prophecy of **Isaiah 28:16**: “Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious...”
  - iv. Causing men to *stumble*.
    - 1. **Isaiah 8:14**, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.”
    - 2. This stone offends people.
- d. If these four prophetic characteristics all apply to Christ, the great “living stone”, then they also will apply to us Christians, whom Peter refers to as “living stones” being built up into a spiritual house. Therefore, as we are becoming like Jesus, Peter is strongly implying that we should expect to be:
  - i. Rejected by men;
  - ii. Chosen by God;
  - iii. Precious to God; and
  - iv. Offensive to people, causing them to stumble.
    - 1. **Caution:** Don’t assume that just because other people find you offensive, that this is a positive sign confirming that you are becoming more like Christ.
      - a. Many times when I have offended others, unfortunately, it is because I am being *rude, inconsiderate, or sinning in some other way!*

2. On the other hand, if we are becoming like Christ (in righteousness), many in the world will be offended by us. Even if you managed to live your Christian life perfectly, the world would not love you. They will be offended by your way of life.
- e. Prophecies about stones and rocks.
- i. Peter mentions three prophecies about Christ being like a stone or rock. With that in mind, here are questions to ponder.
    1. **Question:** Can you think of *any other stone/rock prophecies* in the Old Testament, in addition to the three quoted by Peter?
    2. **Question:** Is there any clue provided in the Old Testament, or in anything Jesus taught, suggesting that references to special *stones or rocks in the Old Testament* could be pointing to *the Christ*?
  - ii. We will address the second question first. Jesus referred to Himself as being like a stone, and specifically as being the *rejected stone* of prophecy.
    1. Read **Matthew 21:33-46**.
      - a. Note that there are parallel accounts of this Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers and the explanation provided by Jesus in **Mark 12:1-12** and **Luke 20:9-19**.
      - b. Jesus applies the prophecy of **Psalms 118:22-23** to Himself. Jesus says that *He is the stone* rejected by the builders.
        - i. The builders are the evil vinedressers in the parable he had just told. In the parable, they rejected and killed the son of the vineyard owner.
        - ii. This applied to the chief priests and Pharisees and the nation they were leading.
      - c. Jesus explained more about that stone of prophecy (Himself).
        - i. Those who “fell on the stone” would be broken.
          1. I personally take this particular ‘broken’ as referring to something that will produce a positive outcome, similar to references of those with broken and contrite hearts whom the Lord will bless

(for example as in **Psalm 34:18**, **Psalm 51:17** and **Psalm 146:3**)

- a. “The Lord is near to those who have a *broken* heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.” (**Psalm 34:18**, NKJV)
    - b. “The sacrifices of God are a *broken* spirit, A *broken* and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.” (**Psalm 51:17**, NKJV)
  - 2. On the other hand, I realize that some others consider ‘being broken upon Jesus’ as another negative outcome.
    - ii. Anyone on whom the stone fell would be utterly destroyed, *ground to powder*.
- iii. Another prophecy that refers to Christ as being a stone.
  - 1. Paul said that the rock in the Wilderness that produced water, from which the Israelites drank, *was Christ*.
    - a. “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” (**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**, NKJV)
  - 2. Old Testament references to this unusual rock.
    - a. Read **Exodus 17:1-7**.
      - i. In this first reference to that rock, Moses was told to strike the rock with his staff, after which it produced water.
    - b. Read **Numbers 20:1-13**.
      - i. Certainly, this story is a reminder that we should do exactly what the Lord tells us.
      - ii. Also, consider that if that rock “was Christ”, and the wooden staff foreshadowed the cross, *perhaps* the reason this act disqualified Moses from entering the Promised Land with the rest of

his people points to the fact that Jesus would only be crucified (rock struck by the rod) once.

1. This reminds me of the warning in **Hebrews** that if we Christians deliberately keep on sinning, we are in effect crucifying Christ a second time, and we will be disqualified from entering our promised and desired destination: heaven.
  - a. “For it is impossible for those who were once 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, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they *crucify again for themselves the Son of God*, and put Him to an open shame.” (**Hebrews 6:4–6**, NKJV)
  - b. Consider also a similar warning in **Hebrews 10:26-31**.
- f. My own experience with stone masonry (construction with stone/rocks).
  - i. The concrete block retaining wall in front of our house was leaning for several years and finally collapsed one day.
  - ii. I made the mistake of deciding to replace it with an authentic New England stone wall, not knowing *how difficult* the project would be.
  - iii. Therefore, I taught myself stone masonry (from books, videos, articles, and carefully looking at other stone walls in our town).
  - iv. Challenging aspects of building with stones include:
    1. Stones can be free, but you first need to find and collect them!
    2. Each stone is unique, especially here in New England. Unlike bricks, stones are highly irregular, with different colors, shapes and sizes; few right angles; and bumps where you don’t want them.
      - a. Unfortunately, striving to be a wall-building purist, I decided not to use a rock hammer. Instead of shaping

the stones to fit, I wanted to use stones exactly as I found them in nature.

3. For certain placements, such as the bottom foundation course, top of wall and corners, you need stones that are stronger and that have 2-3 perpendicular faces. These stones are harder to find.
4. Constructing a proper stone wall is like assembling a 3-D puzzle where the pieces don't really fit, so you need to try to make it work without creating large, awkward gaps that are visible.
  - a. After building my own stone wall, I advised my good friend Chris Traganos, a master carpenter who was contemplating building his own stone retaining wall. My advice to him was: "Please, *don't attempt to do this yourself!* You have no idea how difficult this is and how long it will take you!"
5. Over time I became moderately competent at stone masonry, but the project took me two summers to complete. Every day a few stones added. It was a lesson for me in perseverance!
  - a. **Best I Compliment I Received:** Someone in town saw it and asked neighbors how they could contact the mason who built it (wanted a wall like it).
  - b. **On the Other Hand, a Deflating Comment:** Joel Martin, a former stonemason visiting from PA, told me: "*Nice work...for a do-it-yourselfer.*"
  - c. This past year, in the process of re-shingling my house, I found rotten wood sheathing, under which was rotten wood framing, which rested on a rotten wooden 6x6 sill plate (sitting directly on the house's stone foundation). Under the rotted sill plate, I discovered a damaged section of the house's stone foundation. I ended up jacking up that corner of the house and having to repair the damaged stone foundation before we could replace all the rotted wood.
    - i. So, this past year I was able to utilize the stone masonry skills I had taught myself years before.
6. While building the stone wall, I was always on the lookout for stones that I might be able to use in the wall. Unfortunately, while this wall project was in progress, I could no longer pray

undistracted in the local forest (I was too distracted by noticing all the rocks on the ground).

7. During my stone masonry project, I took over our asphalt driveway and used it to display all the stones I had gathered. Then I would pick over them all to find the next stones that would fit best in the part of the wall I was working on. This selection process was difficult and very slow going.
8. Although it took me two summers to build the wall, that exercise did produce some benefits for me, such as:
  - a. It taught me perseverance. One stone at a time, and don't quit.
  - b. I learned skills that helped me in the face of house foundation repair challenges, years later.
  - c. It gave me the experience to advise others ("Don't do this!")
  - d. It also gave me an extraordinary opportunity to learn lessons about stones that helps me to better appreciate certain passages in the Bible, such as the one we are tackling in this lesson:
    - i. "The stone the builders rejected..."
    - ii. "The precious cornerstone..."
    - iii. Christ as the "living stone" and we Christians as "living stones" that are being fitted together into the church, similar to the construction of a stone building.
    - iv. I spent a lot of time thinking deeply about stones and rocks and noticing all the passages in the Scriptures that refer to them.
- g. The Lord has His own display of *unusual stones* in the Old Testament (in addition to the four references discussed already). They provide us with prophetic insights regarding the Christ.
  - i. Jacob's pillow, the gate of heaven.
    1. Read **Genesis 28:10-22**.
    2. Jacob said this stone pillow was, "...the house of God, the gate of heaven."

3. "This stone I set up as a pillar shall be God's house to me."  
(**Genesis 28:22**)
4. On that stone, upon which Jacob slept, he saw the vision of a ladder (or stairway) connecting heaven and earth, with the angels ascending and descending upon it.
  - a. Jesus refers to this imagery in speaking to Nathaniel when He says: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and *the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*" (**John 1:50-51**, NKJV)
5. The stone is set up as a pillar and *anointed with oil*.
  - a. Recall the meaning of the word "Messiah (Hebrew), same as the word "Christ" (Greek).
  - b. Christ = *the Anointed One* (by definition).
6. Justin Martyr, a philosopher from Samaria who converted to the Christian faith, in a discussion with Trypho, a Jew, c. 160 AD, explains the significance of the unusual stone in this story.
  - a. "He said he had seen a ladder, and the Scripture has declared that God stood above it. But that this was not the Father, we have proved from the Scriptures. And Jacob, having poured oil on a stone in the same place, is testified to by the very God who appeared to him, that he had anointed a pillar to the God who appeared to him. And that the stone symbolically proclaimed Christ, we have also proved by many Scriptures; and that the unguent, whether it was of oil, or of stacte, or of any other compounded sweet balsams, had reference to Him, we have also proved, inasmuch as the word says: 'Therefore God, even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows.' (**Psalms 45:7**) For indeed all kings and anointed persons obtained from Him their share in the names of kings and anointed: just as He Himself received from the Father the titles of King, and Christ [= *the Anointed One*], and Priest, and Angel, and such like other titles which He bears or did bear."

- b. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 86; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 242)
  - ii. Stone knives of the second circumcision of God's people.
    - 1. Read **Joshua 5:2-9**.
      - a. As the Israelites are leaving the Wilderness and entering Canaan, shortly after they cross the Jordan River, the new generation of men is to be circumcised.
      - b. This circumcision must be done with *stone* knives.
    - 2. This circumcision done is done by Joshua.
      - a. Joshua is the Hebrew name, corresponding to the Greek name 'Jesus' as can be seen from the Greek Old Testament text of the LXX, and in the New Testament references to this Old Testament 'Jesus' in the Greek text in **Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 4:8**.
      - b. Recall also that this Old Testament leader of God's people was originally known as 'Hoshea, the son of Nun', but it was changed to Joshua (=Jesus) in **Numbers 13:16**.
    - 3. Also, read (in LXX) **Joshua 24:30-32**.
      - a. Note that this detail, recorded in the LXX text, is missing in Bible translations that have been based on the Masoretic Text. Therefore, you will need to use a Bible based on the LXX to check out this reference.
      - b. Stone knives of the circumcision were "buried with Jesus (=Joshua)".
      - c. **Question:** Why is this *unusual detail* mentioned at the end of Joshua?
      - d. Read **Colossians 2:11-12**.
        - i. **Question:** Is this what Paul was referring to when he wrote that the old (first) circumcision was no longer necessary because we have been circumcised by Christ, having been "buried with Him" in baptism?
        - ii. Jesus gave us the second circumcision, in baptism. In baptism, we have been circumcised

by Jesus, the stone. We have been buried with Him!

4. From Justin Martyr, again in his *Dialogue with Trypho*:
  - a. “The former (*Joshua*) is said to have circumcised the people a second time with knives of stone (which was a sign of this circumcision with which Jesus Christ Himself has circumcised us from the idols made of stone and of other materials), and to have collected together those who were circumcised from the uncircumcision, i.e., from the error of the world, in every place by the knives of stone, to wit, the words of our Lord Jesus. For I have shown that Christ was proclaimed by the prophets in parables a Stone and a Rock. Accordingly the knives of stone we shall take to mean His words, by means of which so many who were in error have been circumcised from uncircumcision with the circumcision of the heart, with which God by Jesus commanded those from that time to be circumcised who derived their circumcision from Abraham, saying that *Jesus (Joshua) would circumcise a second time with knives of stone* those who entered into that holy land.”
  - b. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 113; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 255–256)

iii. The stone that killed the great foe.

1. Read **Judges 9:45-57**.
2. Abimelech, the great enemy feared by God’s people, was killed by a stone dropped by a woman.
  - a. Note that he was especially humiliated to be killed by something *done by a woman*.
  - b. What came from a woman crushed his head, reminiscent of the **Genesis 3:15** prophecy, “He (referring to the seed/Christ who would come from the woman/Mary) will bruise/crush your head (referring to Satan)”.
    - i. This prophecy says that one coming from the woman (Jesus) would give a mortal wound *to the head* of Satan.

iv. Ark led to the stone of Jesus

1. Read **1 Samuel 6:11-16** (designated **1 Kingdoms 6:11-16** in the LXX).
  - a. **Background:** Samuel was a prophet in the times of the priest Eli (and later King Saul). Here the ark has been captured by the Philistines, but it is creating serious problems for them (diseases). So they come up with a plan to see if the diseases are from the Lord.
2. The ark is pulled by cows, led by no man. They go directly to the field of an Israelite man named Joshua (= *Jesus* in Greek, in the LXX) and stop there. The cows are sacrificed on a *large stone* at that location.
3. In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr explains the prophetic significance of this story to Trypho, a Jew.
  - a. "...Jesus, whom we also know to have been Christ the Son of God, who was crucified, and rose again, and ascended to heaven, and will come again to judge all men, even up to Adam himself. You are aware, then,' I continued, 'that when the ark of the testimony was seized by the enemies of Ashdod, and a terrible and incurable malady had broken out among them, they resolved to place it on a cart to which they yoked cows that had recently calved, for the purpose of ascertaining by trial whether or not they had been plagued by God's power on account of the ark, and if God wished it to be taken back to the place from which it had been carried away. And when they had done this, the cows, led by no man, went not to the place whence the ark had been taken, but to the fields of a certain man whose name was (H)oshea, the same as his whose name was altered to Jesus (Joshua), as has been previously mentioned, who also led the people into the land and meted it out to them: and when the cows had come into these fields they remained there, showing to you thereby that they were guided by the name of power; just as formerly the people who survived of those that came out of Egypt, were guided into the land by him who had received the name Jesus (Joshua), who before was called (H)oshea.'"
  - b. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 132; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 266)
- v. The stone that felled another great foe.

1. Read **1 Samuel 17:18-30**.
  2. David killed Goliath with a stone taken from a stream.
  3. David foreshadows Christ, and Goliath foreshadows Satan.
    - a. Note that this stone *crushed the head* of the feared giant, the enemy who had taunted God's people.
    - b. Also, recall that Jesus is referred to as "the Son of David" many places in the gospels (**Matthew 1:1, 20:30**, etc.). He is the King who would come from the body of David, in fulfillment of prophecy (**2 Samuel 7:12-15, 1 Chronicles 17:11-14**).
- vi. The stone destined to crush all the kingdoms of this world.
1. Read **Daniel 2:31-35** and **2:40-45**.
  2. This stone/rock will be cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands.
    - a. Early Christian writers saw this reference "not by human hands" as *another prophecy about the virgin birth of Christ* (in addition to the famous prophecy of **Isaiah 7:14**), Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
    - b. This "rock from a mountain" reminds me of the description of the Son of God as being begotten from the Father (**John 1:14-18**), and being "God from God, light from light, true God from true God," as the divinity of the Son of God is explained in the Nicene Creed.
    - c. This rock, Christ, will found a kingdom that will never end, one that will fill the whole earth.
  3. From Justin Martyr in *Dialogue with Trypho*:
    - a. "And the same thing he (*Daniel*) proclaimed in mystery when he speaks of this stone which was cut out without hands. For the expression 'it was cut out without hands' signified that it is not a work of man, but [a work] of the will of the Father and God of all things, who brought Him forth."
    - b. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 76; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 236)
  4. From Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons (modern-day France), writing c. 180 AD:

- a. "On this account also, Daniel, foreseeing His advent, said that a stone, cut out without hands, came into this world. For this is what 'without hands' means, that His coming into this world was not by the operation of human hands, that is, of those men who are accustomed to stone-cutting; that is, Joseph taking no part with regard to it, but Mary alone co-operating with the pre-arranged plan. For this stone from the earth derives existence from both the power and the wisdom of God. Wherefore also Isaiah says: 'Thus says the Lord, Behold, I deposit in the foundations of Zion a stone, precious, elect, the chief, the corner-one, to be had in honor.' (Isaiah 28:16) So, then, we understand that His advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God."
- b. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 21; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 453)

### III. In Conclusion, Lessons from the 'Gallery of Unusual Stones'

- a. Jesus, who Peter refers to as the "the living stone" is:
  - i. The anointed stone.
    - 1. The gate of heaven, the house of God, the stairway or ladder connecting heaven and earth.
  - ii. The stone that gives us the water of life in the (spiritual) Wilderness, a desert.
    - 1. The stone that would be struck by the wood only once.
  - iii. The stone rejected by the builders.
  - iv. The stone chosen by God, and precious.
  - v. The stumbling stone that would cause offense among men.
  - vi. Those trusting in this stone will never be put to shame.
  - vii. The stone associated with the name 'Jesus'.
  - viii. The stone that brings the second circumcision, one of the heart, cutting away the sins of the flesh.
  - ix. The stone that will defeat our enemy, Satan, by crushing him in the head.

1. That stone would be drawn out of the water.
- x. The stone that would come from a woman only (not from man + woman).
  1. This points to the virgin birth of Jesus.
- xi. The stone that would be cut from a mountain, but not by human hands, would crush the kingdoms of this world and become a kingdom that fills the whole earth.
  1. This also foreshadows the virgin birth of Jesus, as well as the divinity of Christ.
  2. This also points to the eternal kingdom that He would establish, which will fill the whole world and last forever.
- b. We Christians are to be “living stones”.
  - i. We also will be *rejected by men*, as Jesus was.
  - ii. We also are *chosen by God*.
  - iii. We also are *precious to God*.
  - iv. Others will stumble over us if we are walking in righteousness according to the pattern established by Jesus.
    1. “In regard to these, they [*the pagans*] think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” (**1 Peter 4:4**, NKJV)
    2. “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. *To the one we are the aroma of death* leading to death, and to the other *the aroma of life leading to life...*” (**2 Corinthians 2:15–16**, NKJV)
  - v. We Christians, as the church, are a variety of different stones that being fitted together, as stones are constructed into a wall or building, to become a glorious temple in which God dwells.