

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The meaning of...

CORNERSTONE

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you to read the references given. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

Please note: some translations of the Bible use 'CAPSTONE' (NIV), others use the word 'CORNERSTONE' (AV, NASB). For this study we will use 'Cornerstone'. In a building both are very important stones in holding the structure together.

Bible Readings: Daniel 2:34-44; Acts 4:11

Key Verse: "He is the stone which was rejected by you . . . but which became the chief cornerstone." (Acts 4:11 NASB).

Jesus Christ was "the Stone the builders rejected" (Romans 9:32-33). Christ and His Kingdom also represented in the Rock that struck Nebuchadnezzar's statue on its feet and smashed it to fine dust which was blown away in the wind (Daniel 2:34). This would happen, God said, "in the time of those kings" or in the days of the Roman Empire.

Rome also tried desperately to bring together the wild tribes of Europe and England under its rule. But it failed to do this. The tribes were like the iron and baked clay of the statue's feet. They could not be united. Rather than the brittle iron and clay of the Roman Empire, God established Christ's Kingdom on the earth as a permanent and united body which the Bible calls "the Church" (Ephesians 2:20).

In Daniel we find that the Rock struck the statue only once. Then the rock "became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35).

In Jesus' parable, a tiny mustard seed grew into a great tree that offered shade to all the creatures of the forest (Mark 4:30-32). In this parable Jesus spoke of the gospel which would go out into all the world and gather Jew and Gentile, and all other believers from whatever people group, into His Kingdom (Revelation 7:9).

TALK ABOUT

1. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar's statue (Daniel 2:44)?
2. Does the gospel have more life and power in it than a statue of gold?
3. What parable did Jesus tell to show this truth?

PETER SPOKE TO A MIXED CROWD

Peter told the crowd of Jews and Gentiles that "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead... He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone (or the Head of the corner, AV)" (Acts 4:10-11). Then he made the most striking claim. Peter said to the crowd: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven (meaning, 'in all the earth') given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). To trust in the high priest or the temple was useless for Jesus Christ has replaced both.

Peter was repeating what Jesus had said to the Pharisees. After telling the parable of the tenant farmers, Jesus said, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'." (Matthew 21:42).

So Peter joined the metaphor of the stone or rock with Jesus Christ's offer of salvation, or a free pardon to any sinner who repented and trusted in His death and resurrection. Paul made this easy to understand when he wrote to the Christians in Rome: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

The Jews did not believe Paul's words, so he quoted a verse written by the prophet Isaiah 700 years before: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a Rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame" (Isaiah 28:16). Isaiah spoke of Jesus as "a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, set for a sure foundation."

God spoke to Job and said, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its foundations set, or who laid its cornerstone?" (Job 37:3-6).

The cornerstone was set at the corner of a building where two walls came together, or at the corner of the foundation. The cornerstone was so important because all the measurements for making the building square, strong and safe were taken from this special stone.

It was Isaiah's words that gave Paul authority to say, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). He went on to say, "If any man builds (the truth of God's word) on this foundation," it will never be destroyed.

TALK ABOUT

1. What did Peter tell the crowd about Jesus?
2. On what foundation was Paul building his work? (1 Corinthians 3:11)

GOD IS THE MASTER BUILDER

God is the Master builder. Every day, God is adding "living stones" to His building. The living stones are men and women of every race, colour and language who have been born again by His Spirit (John 3:5,8; 1 Peter 2:5). They are drawn from every corner of the earth and made to fit together in the same world-wide community called the Church of Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus told Peter and His disciples, "On this Rock I will build My Church...." (Matthew 16:18).

Paul also said he was adding precious stones to God's building. He was like a subcontractor on a large building. A subcontractor agrees to do one small part of the work. Paul preached in the cities of Asia Minor and established churches there. When Paul was put in prison, others took up the work which he had been doing. They preached the very same Gospel and more "living stones" were added to the Church. Have you considered Christ's claim on your life and yielded it to Him?

Where is the Christian Church? It is everywhere that men and women worship the true and living God. By faith in Jesus Christ, they are joined to Him and receive His life. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Eternal life means to be forever living. These frail human bodies die, but the spirit within them goes on living.

Are you a living stone or a dead one? Living stones have God's life in them. They are born again by His Spirit. One day Jesus will come on the clouds of heaven and call to them. He will give them a new body suited to life in heaven. The prophet Daniel wrote, about the end time, "Everyone whose name is found written in the Book will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life (the living stones), others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up . . . and so we will be with the Lord for ever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who is the Master Builder?
2. Who else can be involved in building God's House?
3. What do we mean by "the Christian Church"?
4. People who believe in Jesus (Romans 10:10) and confess Him are called "living stones" in God's building. Are you a living stone?

THE BOOK OF LIFE

Daniel and John spoke of “The Book,” or “The Book of Life” or “The Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 20:12). God registers in a Book every new life He gives. God forms the spirit of a person (Zechariah 12:1). He gives the spirit to the new life when it is conceived in its mother’s womb. And He takes the spirit away when the body dies (Ecclesiastes 12:7). If the person believed the gospel in their lifetime and received salvation in Jesus, his or her name remains in the Book of Life. If the person rejects Christ, the stone which God set in Zion, (Isaiah 28:16), or “stumbles over it” (Romans 9:33) and falls, their name is erased from the Book of Life.

God gives those whose names are written in the Book of Life a free pardon. They are “in Christ Jesus” and Paul said, “there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

All others, who trust in themselves, or in their own form of law-keeping, will fall and be put to shame, or put out of life’s race (Romans 9:33). At the judgment they will hear the Lord say, “Away from Me. I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

TALK ABOUT

1. What is the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12)?
2. Why is God able to be just and yet give sinners a free pardon?

THE STONE REJECTED

John the apostle wrote about Jesus. He said, “He (Jesus) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world (of men) did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own (the Jews), but His own did not recognize Him” (John 1:10-11).

Jesus’ own people, the Jews, did not recognize who He was, the very son of God. And they did not receive Him with open arms, even though John the Baptist had told of His coming and all their prophets through all of their history had taught that one day God would send a Messiah who would bring God’s salvation, “He would sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He would purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD” (Matt 3:1-3).

In the Psalms, the writer gives thanks to God who had sent the Son into the world, “and it is marvellous in our eyes. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...” (Psalm 118:22-23). Who were these builders? They were the leaders and chief priests of the Jewish people. God had given them the task of showing forth His glory and compassion in all the earth.

God had promised them the Saviour. Jeremiah told the small number of people who survived the captivity in Babylon, “the time is coming ... when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... this city will be rebuilt ... all will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished” (Jeremiah 31:31-40).

TALK ABOUT

1. What did Jeremiah the prophet tell the people (Jeremiah 31:31-34)?

A PERMANENT CITY

The city built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will be everlasting. Jesus said, “I will build My Church” and even Satan himself and the “gates of hell” will not destroy it. Jesus could just as easily have said, “I will build My city...” or “I will build My Kingdom...” They are one and the same thing, Mount Zion is the throne of God.

King David challenged his men to take Jebus, the hill fortress in southern Canaan and make it the Lord’s. The Jebusites who occupied the hill fortress sent a message to David: “You will not get in here.”

David told his men, “Whoever leads an attack on the Jebusites will become (my) Commander-in-Chief.”

General Joab led a band of men up the rocky slopes to attack the Jebusites who occupied the fortress. He captured the fortress which David so desired (1 Chronicles 11:4). So Joab became Commander of David's fighting men.

David used the fortress as his residence and it became known as "the City of David." The fortress was also called Jerusalem and Zion. David built up the wall on the slopes around the fortress to protect it (1 Chronicles 11:8). He worshipped God on the mountain and immediately thought of it as God's dwelling place (Psalm 2:6). Later His son, Solomon, built the temple there.

So Zion became known as the mountain of God and Jerusalem the city of God. God used these places and events as symbols of a great spiritual truth. Zion became a symbol of God's throne.

The prophet Micah wrote, "Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways...' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:2).

The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

The prophet said that Jesus would ride into the city of Jerusalem on a young donkey. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus did ride into the city in the last days before He was crucified (Matthew 21:5).

TALK ABOUT

1. How did Jerusalem get its name?
2. Did it always belong to the people of Israel?
3. What did king Jesus do just before He was crucified (Matthew 21:5)?

DAVID HAD MANY ENEMIES

David had many enemies and many struggles. He wrote, "In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and He answered me by setting me free... I will give You thanks... You have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:6, 21-22).

The Jewish 'builders' rejected Jesus and His teaching. In speaking of Him as "the LORD Almighty," the prophet Isaiah wrote, "He will be a sanctuary (for those who repent), but for both houses of Israel (meaning Israel and Judah) He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (Isaiah 8:13-14).

New Testament writers took those words and applied them to the Jewish nation of their day. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone.' As it is written, 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.'" (Romans 9:31-33; Isaiah 8:13-14).

Peter continued this thought, "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe: The stone the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.'" (1 Peter 2:6-8).

Peter explained, "They stumble because they disobey the message..." The message is the gospel of Jesus Christ which was first preached to the Jews by our Lord Himself (Mark 1:15).

The Pharisees stumbled over what Jesus said to them, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." (John 10:9). Jesus wanted so much for them to believe. But time after time most of them could not accept Jesus' teaching. They refused to believe He was the promised Messiah, they preferred their own way.

Sadly, today, many hear the good news - the truth that Jesus is able to save them, that He is the rock on which they can build their lives. But they also find this 'stone' too hard and turn away. They trip over it, when God wants them to STAND UPON the truth, and make it a foundation for a new life in Christ.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why do men stumble over the stone (1 Peter 2:6-8)?

2. Who were the Jewish 'builders' who rejected the stone?
3. Who was David's commander?

YOU HAVE COME TO MOUNT ZION

To all believers who anticipate heaven, God declares, "You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly..." (Hebrews 12:22).

God's Son Jesus Christ was the stone set on Zion. His law or teaching went out from Jerusalem. Those who believe the gospel will finally be gathered into the spiritual Zion, the city of the living God.

Jesus said to His disciples, "In My Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you... I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-4).

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