

PREFACE

Question/Discussion: Why did Jesus come?

In *Reflections* last week I wrote about how the world has conveniently misinterpreted references in God's word regarding the "peace" of Christ, beginning with the familiar Christmas announcement by the angels to the shepherds.

It is far too common that people think the peace of Jesus represents some sort of universal nirvana. Every Christmas they hear the truncated message of the angel host to the shepherds, "And on earth peace," rarely hearing the accurate rendering of the rest of the line: "among men with whom He is pleased." Those preferring the simpleton flavor of Christianity believe Christ came to inaugurate a feel-good, touchy-feely, kumbaya paradise. But He did not.

Read Luke 12:51-52.

Jesus the Messiah did not come to unite; He came to divide. And there is a word-picture that runs throughout the OT that illustrates this.

Sidebar: I confess to you that I am having a hard time segregating and organizing these OT prophecies, because they often combine in themselves multiple aspects of the Messiah. For example, I had intended to address Messiah's kingship as a discreet topic, but I am finding that almost impossible, as His kingship is scattered throughout so many prophecies that deal with *other* aspects of His fulfillment.

Similarly, it may seem odd that immediately after addressing His birth in Bethlehem we are examining His role as "the Rock" and the "Cornerstone," but these seemed appropriate since they are foundational to why Christ Jesus came in the first place.

OLD TESTAMENT

The image of Yahweh, Father God, as the Rock is a common one in the Old Testament—as far back as Genesis. In Deuteronomy 32, in the final song of Moses before his death, he mentions it several times.

Read Deuteronomy 32:3-4.

Here is the familiar image of the Lord God as someone strong, firm, dependable. The picture is of a huge, immovable boulder, or of a high stony cliff giving one the superior high ground over one's enemies.

But in just a few verses of his song, Moses declares that Israel ["Jeshurun" ([yesh-oo-roon'](#))] rebelled and chose not to stand on that Rock.

Read Deuteronomy 32:15-18.

The Rock remains the same: strong, dependable. It represents just one: Yahweh. And it has one purpose: security, refuge. But some made their choice against that security; they rejected their God, turning to lesser “gods.”

In Isaiah 8 the imagery shifts. Now the rock [\[same Hebrew word\]](#) has two purposes.

Read Isaiah 8:13-15.

Yahweh remains a sanctuary—a place of refuge and safety—but now, curiously, that same rock is also something of an obstacle, something to bruise and wound—even to death. Geoffrey Grogan points out that

it is impossible in English to convey the terrifying force of the seven Hebrew words that constitute v15... We may essay something like the following: “They will stumble, many of them, they will fall, be smashed, snared, seized.” This conveys a little of the sentence’s form, but does scant justice to its extreme terseness or to its auditory power.

Now that rock of safety has a precipitous edge to it, and some will take a header off that cliff—to their doom.

In Isaiah 28 the imagery of the Rock evolves further. In v16 it is still Yahweh speaking [\[here expressed as “Yahweh adonay” \(sovereign Lord\)\]](#).

Read Isaiah 28:16.

Now the Rock—literally, a “stone,” such as a stone one might build with—is not Yahweh, but one Yahweh sets in place in Zion. But this is no ordinary stone; it is

- **tested** (tried, put through a trial)
- **costly**, precious, valuable
- the **cornerstone**: not just one stone among many comprising a wall, but the one **essential** stone upon which the entire building relies; it is the **first** stone set in place, set on immovable **bedrock**, perfectly aligned (literally, “**well-laid**”), with the first two walls aligned with and stabilized by it
- in a sense, the new **sanctuary**—that is, those who believe (trust in, put their faith in) this cornerstone, will not be anxious or feel the need to flee in panic; they may rest secure [\[JFB: flee in hasty alarm; he who rests on Him shall not have the shame of disappointment, nor flee in sudden panic; K&D: “he that believeth will not flee,” i.e., will stand firm, clearly indicates, it is a promise for believers alone\]](#)

Grogan: A comparison of the language of 8:14 and the present passage shows us that there the sanctuary and stone were God Himself, whereas here the stone is laid by God. If this passage is a development of the former, then we are bound to ask, “Who, in Isaiah’s prophecies, is both God and distinct from Him?” The clear answer is, “the Messiah.”

Now we move to Psalm 118, where there is a further association made between the cornerstone and the sanctuary. In Deuteronomy 32 the Rock, and in Isaiah 8 the sanctuary of God, are rejected and/or stumbled over—"a snare and a trap". Then, in Isaiah 28, God sends a *new* sanctuary—a "cornerstone." Now, in Psalm 118 this cornerstone, like God's sanctuary, is rejected.

Read Psalm 118:22-23.

Sidebar: Whether your translation says "corner stone" or "capstone," the meaning is essentially the same—the stone that stabilizes a structure. Here it is the "chief" or "head" stone.

Here is a picture of the builders considering a rock for use as a cornerstone and rejecting it for another. But this Hebrew word means far more than just simply setting aside one stone for another:

rejected = *ma-as'* = a primitive root; **to spurn**; also (intransitive) to disappear :- **abhor**, **cast away** (off), contemn, **despise**, disdain, (become) **loathe** (-some), melt away, refuse, reject, reprobate, × utterly, vile person.

He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
(Isaiah 53:3)

Sidebar: In His time on earth, they did not just disagree with the Cornerstone, they hated Him, they feared Him. And it is still true today. The world over, and in the left of this country, people do not just disagree with Christianity, choosing with cool logic some other faith over it. No, they hate it, they despise it, they fear it.

NEW TESTAMENT

How do we know this Rock, this stone, and this new sanctuary prefigure the Christ? The NT writers agree that they do.

Luke's Gospel

Turn to Luke 2.

After the birth of Jesus, and after the days of purification have passed for Mary, Joseph and Mary present the child at the temple. Being poor, they bring as their sacrifice to dedicate their firstborn two turtledoves and two pigeons. There they meet a prophet named Simeon, one "looking for the consolation of Israel."

Simeon immediately recognizes the baby as the Christ. He first cites the messianic prophecies of Isaiah, that what Jesus would be bringing was not just light for Israel, but light for the Gentiles. Then Simeon turns to Mary, with a special prophecy for her.

Read Luke 2:34-35.

In this Child some in Israel would rise, some would fall. Remember, Jesus says later that He did not come to bring peace, but division: some would rise, some would fall.

And Simeon tells the young mother that her son would meet with opposition; he would be spoken against, hated, and rejected. And no doubt as she stood beneath the cross on that fateful day, she was reminded that the old man in the temple thirty-three years earlier had told her that “a sword will pierce even your own soul.”

Jesus Himself

In Matthew’s gospel, after Jesus regales the chief priests and elders with the parable of the vineyard workers killing the landowner’s son, Jesus identifies Himself with the rejected stone from Psalm 118.

Read Matthew 21:42-45.

The Acts

In Acts 4, the Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter declares outright that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Cornerstone through whom salvation would be found.

Read Acts 4:8-12.

Romans

The apostle Paul, quoting Isaiah 28 in his letter to the Romans, explains that so many Jews failed to attain righteousness because they pursued it through the law, rather than through faith. The Gentiles rose, while the Jews fell. Why did they fall? They tripped over the stone of stumbling—they tripped over the truth of Christ Jesus.

Read Romans 9:30-33.

Peter

The apostle Peter pulls together *all* the prophecies—Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, and Isaiah 8—in his eloquent discourse on believers as *living* stones.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-8.

Ephesians

We have been discussing at length, and looking at all these OT and NT passages that speak of Christ as the cornerstone. But a cornerstone is there for a reason; it is set carefully in place so that a building can be erected upon it. Peter broached the subject in the passage we just read, but now I want to close with a passage in Ephesians where the apostle Paul speaks in greater detail of that building, built up from the cornerstone of Christ.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

There’s the completed picture! Christ, the cornerstone, set carefully, precisely in place, perfectly aligned on the immovable bedrock. Then the first two walls of the prophets and apostles are built out from it. Then upon all that is built up the church, in which every believer is a living stone, part of the whole.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

3 “For I proclaim the name of the Lord;
Ascribe greatness to our God!
4 “**The Rock!** His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He.”

Deuteronomy 32:15-18

15 “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—
**Then he forsook God who made him,
And scorned the Rock of his salvation.**
16 “They made Him jealous with strange gods;
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.
17 “They sacrificed to demons who were not God,
To gods whom they have not known,
New gods who came lately,
Whom your fathers did not dread.
18 “**You neglected the Rock who begot you,
And forgot the God who gave you birth.**”

Isaiah 8:13-15

13 “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy.
And He shall be your fear,
And He shall be your dread.
14 “**Then He shall become a sanctuary;
But to both the houses of Israel,
a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.**
15 “**Many will stumble over them,
Then they will fall and be broken;
They will even be snared and caught.**”

Isaiah 28:16

Therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.”

The Rock/Cornerstone (1)

Jeshurun = Israel

Luke 12:51-52

51 “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth?
I tell you, no, but rather division;
52 for from now on five members in one household will
be divided, three against two and two against three.

Luke 2:34-35

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His
mother, “Behold, **this Child is appointed for the fall and
rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—**
35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the
end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Psalms 118:22-23

22 The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.
23 This is the Lord's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

Fulfillment or Reference**Matthew 21:42-45**

42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures,
"The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the chief corner stone;
This came about from the Lord,
And it is marvelous in our eyes?"
43 "Therefore I say to you, **the kingdom of God will be
taken away from you and given to a people, producing
the fruit of it.**
44 "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces;
but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."
45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His
parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

Acts 4:8-12

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,
"Rulers and elders of the people,
9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man,
as to how this man has been made well,
10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Is-
rael, that by the name of **Jesus Christ the Nazarene**, whom
you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this
name this man stands here before you in good health.
11 "**He is the stone** which was rejected by you, the
builders, but which became the chief corner stone.
12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no
other name under heaven that has been given among
men by which we must be saved."

The Rock/Cornerstone (2)**Romans 9:30-33**

30 What shall we say then? **That Gentiles, who did not
pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the
righteousness which is by faith;**
31 **but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not
arrive at that law.**
32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as
though it were by works. **They stumbled over the stum-
bling stone,**
33 **just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of
stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in
Him will not be disappointed."**

1 Peter 2:4-8

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been re-
jected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,
5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a
spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual
sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in
Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he
who believes in Him will not be disappointed."
7 **This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but
for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders
rejected, This became the very corner stone,"**
8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for
they stumble because they are disobedient to the word,
and to this doom they were also appointed.

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but
you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's
household,
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and
prophets, **Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,**
21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is
growing into a holy temple in the Lord,
22 in whom you also are being built together into a
dwelling of God in the Spirit.