

Ps 31; Acts 7:55-60; 1 Pe 2:2-10; Jn 14:1-14

Our Chief Cornerstone

I wondered why this rock kept getting bigger, then it hit me. (bestoflifeonline.com)

On my first study visit to Israel, we had a Palestinian guide named Michael. Our driver's name was Mafouz. Michael was a learned Palestinian Christian. Mafouz spoke very little English, but he was fearless in city traffic and narrow streets. He was very fast on the freeway. When it was time to depart one site and head for another, Michael would say, "Mafouz, push gaz!" And off we would go on another adventure.

Our guide referred to Israel, especially Jerusalem, as the place of stones. He was speaking of the stone altars built by the patriarchs and the piles of commemorative rocks put up at times and places important to God's people, as when Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River. Michael noted that the massive walls of Jericho, Jerusalem and Hebron are all made of stone. Also, stoning was the method of execution for Israelites who broke the Law. Even the courtyard where Jesus was tried, Gabbatha or Lithostrotos (meaning pavement) is composed of stones worn smooth by the feet of ancient peoples. Stones are everywhere in the Holy Land.

Today we approach the names of Jesus that refer to the stones of the ANE. He is called the Rock of Ages. He is also called the Chief Cornerstone. If we took time to list all the symbolic and metaphorical names of God in Scripture, we would be here all day. We will focus on these two names that are at the heart of our Bible readings for today. The stones – the rocks of Israel.

Now a rock in the desert is a great gift. When the scorching sun bangs down on the sand, you need a rock – a very big rock. Your rock will give you precious shade. In the dry atmosphere of southern Palestine/Israel there can be a ten degree drop in temperature in the shadow of the rock – in the shade. Builders used stone for temples, government buildings and even larger homes. Poor folks built with brick, which offers the greatest cooling effect at the least expense.

The idea of a massive rock is the image of shelter and protection. The psalmist writes, "(O Lord) be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me." (Ps 31:2) The concept of the comforting shadow of a gigantic rock points to the revelation that God (our Rock) protects us – and also defeats both our military and our spiritual enemies. God is the immovable Mover. He is not stationary nor inert – but rather He causes great events that drive history. He is a living stone.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that five successive worldly kingdoms appeared as a giant royal statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. In the dream the king saw a massive stone cut out of a great mountain. The stone came flying and crushed all those kingdoms to dust. The great mountain that fills all the earth is the mountain of God. The kingdom of God is eternally established – and cannot be destroyed. By God's power all the worldly kingdoms are swept away. The Prophet Daniel interpreted the dream for the king and confirmed that it was true. This vision is in the time of the exile in Babylon (6th c BC).

The image of this great rock becomes the image of the massive cornerstone that is the foundation of a great house and a great city, beginning as the stone carved out of the mountain of God.

This stone, this rock, is from our God – recognized in ancient times – with promises of care and provision and protection through writings of the prophets. The fulfillment of this Deliverer and Savior is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter quotes the Prophet Isaiah:

"Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." (1 Pe 2:6; Is 28:16-18)

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Messiah is the Rock – the chief Cornerstone of God’s building. And here’s the news you can use – Peter calls upon us – the Jesus-followers:

“...coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 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.” (vv 4-5)

You and I are “being built up as a spiritual house”. This is the Good News for today. Whatever your culture, your ethnicity, your color or your status in the world, you are part of the spiritual house God is building.

Let’s unpack these verses a bit. Everybody has a choice. Peter reminds us, and he draws upon Isaiah’s twenty-eighth chapter here – the philosophers, the arrogant, the worldly wise – these reject the Stone – that is reject Christ. You know this. You see it and hear it daily.

Peter warns us, rejecting this Cornerstone set in place by God has consequences. The stone set in place becomes for those who throw Jesus away an object of stumbling and falling. Stumbling and falling over the Cornerstone are the result of disbelief and disobedience.

The one who takes shelter in the Lord becomes part of God’s own people. We in turn are the living stones that speak of God’s mighty works – His acts of mercy, of provision and of love. We each find our place in Christ’s kingdom. We depend upon Him to guide us to grow in His likeness. We have become His dwelling place – we are fitted together for His praise and glory. Amen.