

Simon Peter, Living Stones

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The video version is available at: https://youtu.be/KX_Q8M7q5Oo

The scripture reading is 1st Peter 2:4-3:12

In the opening chapter of First Peter, Peter reminds his Jewish and Gentile readers in the diaspora that the foundation of their faith is that redemption is available to them by the death and resurrection of Yeshua.

1 Peter 1:3-5 NKJV 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Those who are kept by the power of God will receive the promised inheritance. With this statement, Peter sets up the rest of his letter elaborating on what it means to be kept by the power of God. In this portion of his letter, Peter addresses who believers are now that they have been newly begotten. He delves into what this means for believers in terms of relating to those around them including governmental authority, masters or employers, and husbands or wives. These issues are just as applicable to believers today as they were then.

We open this portion of Peter's letter with Peter using imagery more familiar to Jewish believers than Gentile believers. He reminds his readers who they are in relation to both God and Yeshua.

1 Peter 2:4-5 NKJV 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This verse opens with the word "coming." It is the present tense form of the Greek word "Pros-er-khom-ah-ee," number 4334 in Strong's Greek Concordance meaning, in the present tense, coming near, drawing near, approaching. Peter describes the believer as acting in the present drawing near to Yeshua who is the living stone. The imagery of a living stone as opposed to a dead stone brings out the contrast between manmade idols of gods carved out of stone and the true living God who is not and cannot be represented by an image of stone. Instead of an image of stone, Moses refers to God as a rock of salvation.

Perhaps, the imagery of a living stone also calls to mind a play on Peter's Greek name "Petros," given to him by Yeshua as recorded by Matthew. Matthew's gospel, widely thought to be the first gospel written, may have been available to the believers in the diaspora.

Matthew 16:18 NKJV 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

"Petros," number 4074 in Strong's Concordance, means rock and is associated with the promise of building Yeshua's congregation.

Yeshua, a living stone, was rejected by man but chosen by God. The Greek word for "rejected" is "ap-od-ok-ee-mad'-zo," number 593 in Strong's Concordance meaning to disapprove, repudiate or reject. It comes from a word meaning to test or examine. Yeshua, as the living stone, was rejected after being examined or tested.

The contrast is stark—to man Yeshua was not worthy; to God Yeshua was chosen, selected, precious and of great worth.

This coming near to Yeshua who is a living stone is not the one time act of salvation but continuing actions that allow the believers, themselves, to be living stones. Believers, like Yeshua, are not dead, but living, breathing, and growing beings built into a spiritual house which is also living, breathing and growing. It is a living house to which believers are called to be a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Once again, this imagery would be more readily understood by Jews as it invites comparison to events at Mt. Sinai when God first called the children of Israel to be a special people and to build a house for Him to dwell in. The spiritual house Peter refers to is not the physical tabernacle in the wilderness in which only the select few sons of Aaron can be priests to God. The tabernacle and Aaronic priesthood are a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle and priesthood in the world to come. However, we can look at the Aaronic priesthood and the acceptable sacrifices as described to us in Leviticus to understand the requirements and blessings of being part of the priesthood and what makes an acceptable sacrifice!

In contrast to those who accept Yeshua, Peter says that those to whom Yeshua was first presented as the living stone rejected Him fulfilling the prophecies in Isaiah and the Psalms.

1 Peter 2:6-8 NKJV 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

This is not the first time Peter refers to Yeshua as the rejected stone and the chief cornerstone. When he and James, son of Zebedee, were arrested by the temple guards and brought before the Sanhedrin, Peter testified that Yeshua was the cornerstone they rejected.

Acts 4:10-12 NKJV 10 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Yeshua told a parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard and placed vinedressers over the vineyard. When it was time to take in the crop, the vinedressers killed the servants sent to collect it until finally, they killed the son of the landowner. The conclusion was that the landowner would take the vineyard from the vinedressers and give it to others. Yeshua concluded by citing the prophecy in the Psalms.

Matthew 21:42-45 NKJV 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." 45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

At the time that Peter wrote this letter to the believers in Asia Minor, the Jewish religious leadership represented by the Sanhedrin was the chief persecutors of the Jewish and Gentile believers. They were the ones who had Paul arrested. This was about the time that James the brother of Yeshua and the leader of the Jerusalem body of believers was executed by the Sanhedrin. Peter is reminding the believers that the Jewish

leadership had rejected and was still rejecting Yeshua as Messiah. However, Peter reminds his readers that, although the Jewish leadership had rejected them, they were chosen and precious to God.

1 Peter 2:9-10 NAS95 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Once again, Peter emphasizes that believers are chosen by God! The Greek word translated as "race" is "genos," number 1085 in Strong's Concordance meaning kin, countryman, nation or offspring. Believers are chosen to be a family, the offspring of God.

John presents this same contrast between those who reject Yeshua and those who receive Him.

John 1:11-13 NKJV 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Believers are chosen by God and born anew as children of God By God's sovereign will! As children we are to be a royal priesthood. Earlier, Peter described believers as a holy priesthood. How are believers both a holy and a royal priesthood? "Holy" means to be separate and set apart. The word "royal" is the Greek word "basil'ios," number 934 in Strong's Concordance meaning kingly. Believers are from the lineage of the king if they are indeed children of God! This family that believers are part of is to be holy, set apart, as belonging to God! This was the promise God made to Israel at Mt. Sinai if they kept His commandments.

Exodus 19:5-6 NKJV 5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Does this mean that Israel is no longer God's people? No, In Yeshua's parable of the vineyard, the vineyard is not replaced; it is only the vinedressers who are replaced. Yeshua says that the New Jerusalem is built upon both the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles.

Paul explains that Jewish and Gentile believers are both part of the same root. The disobedient branches are cut off but can be grafted in again.

Romans 11:16-18 NKJV 16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

Continuing in verse 23:

Romans 11:23 NKJV 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Salvation comes to Jew and Gentile alike through the promise to Abraham passed down through Isaac and Jacob.

Peter's admonition to believers is the same as that of Moses to the children of Israel; be obedient to God!

1 Peter 1:13-16 NKJV 13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Peter builds on his instructions for holiness telling believers that they are to regard themselves as strangers to the world reminding them to abstain from acts of the flesh.

1 Peter 2:11-12 NAS95 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Even as Peter is writing this letter to the believers in the Roman world, they are being portrayed as evil workers of perversion. The Roman historian Tacitus, as quoted by First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles, describes the perception of followers of the Way.

"The Christus from whom the name was derived had suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pestilent superstition was stopped for a while, but began to break out again, not only in Judea, the birthplace of the evil thing, but also in Rome, where everything that is horrible and shameless flows together and becomes fashionable."ⁱ

Because believers were under such scrutiny, they were to make sure their behavior was exemplary. Peter goes on to describe some specific behaviors that would demonstrate their good deeds. The first one is not one that we would usually consider a good deed. Peter instructs believers to follow the laws of the land.

1 Peter 2:13-17 NAS95 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

The word "submit" is the Greek word "hoop-ot-as'-so," number 5293 in Strong's Concordance meaning to subordinate, obey, be under, or submit to. Even in the perilous times that Peter lived in, he instructs believers to submit to governmental authority. On the other hand, Peter told the Sanhedrin that it is better to follow God than man.

Acts 4:19-20 NKJV 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Peter goes on to apply this concept of submission to servants and slaves towards their masters even the harsh and unjust masters!

1 Peter 2:18-20 NKJV 18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

Peter states that believers are called to suffer as Christ suffered and compares the suffering under an unjust master as being like the suffering that Christ endured. Peter describes how Yeshua, through His suffering, bore our sins so that we might live and be healed.

Finally, Peter instructs that, in the same manner that citizens are to submit to governmental authority and servants to their masters, wives are to be in submission to their husbands.

1 Peter 3:1-2 NKJV 1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

This submission by wives is not just to a righteous or believing husband. Wives are to submit even to an unbelieving husband with the hope that he would be saved. This submission is only to their own husband not to others. Paul gives further instruction stating that if the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the marriage relationship, the believing spouse should let him or her go.

Peter describes the behavior of the wife that will win the husband as being inwardly beautiful.

1 Peter 3:3-4 NKJV 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Peter, then, instructs husbands that their behavior towards their wives is to be honorable.

1 Peter 3:7 NKJV 7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter uses the word "likewise" for both the wife and the husband referring back to the original example of submission. John MacArthur in his commentary on First Peter expands on this concept:

"This time it is the believing husband who submits to serve his wife. Husbands obey that duty by adhering to three basic responsibilities in caring for their wives' needs: consideration, chivalry, and companionship."ⁱⁱ

This relationship between husband and wife is so important that without it the husbands' prayers would be hindered!

Peter concludes this section by extending this idea of submission to all believers in their interactions with each other. Submission to one another leads to a blessing!

1 Peter 3:8-9 NKJV 8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Peter uses the words of Psalm 34 to describe the blessing for the believer who follows the path of submission as that of loving life, seeing good days and having God's ears open to their prayers!

Yeshua also taught us about and demonstrated submission. He speaks over and over that He submits to the Father and that it is only through the Father that He has authority. We come to Him, a Living Stone, and are also to be living stones. We are to live in holiness and submission so that others observing our lives may come

to the saving knowledge of Yeshua that through His suffering, death and resurrection they also can receive eternal life.

Study Questions:

1. How does Peter build on the imagery at Mt. Sinai to describe the believers? What is the difference between the physical event at Mt. Sinai and the spiritual event represented by Yeshua's death and resurrection?
2. What is the spiritual house and the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:4 and 2:9)? What does Paul say about building a spiritual house?
3. What are the blessings available to the priesthood and how do they apply to the spiritual priesthood Peter refers to? What is the role of the spiritual priest?
4. Peter quoted Hosea chapter 1 about LoAmmi meaning not my people becoming His people. What is the context of the prophecy in Hosea? How did Peter apply it? Who is Peter's audience?
5. How do Paul, Peter and Yeshua demonstrate submission? What does submission look like today?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

Bonus: Compare the mission and message of Peter to that of Paul. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Is there any contradiction between them?

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ⁱ Chronicles of the Apostles. Quoting Tacitus, Annals 15.44. D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 4 Page 1018.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, The MacArthur Commentary 1st Peter, Moody Press, 2004, p180.