

## Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

Devotional Reading: Galatians 3:23–29

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1–17

1 Peter 2:1–12

**1** Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

**2** As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

**3** If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

**4** To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

**5** Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

**6** Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

**7** Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

**8** And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

**9** But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

**10** Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

**11** Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

**12** Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

### Key Text

*To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. —1 Peter 2:5*

# Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

## Unit 3: Christians and Sacrifice

Lessons 10–14

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the stone in Zion.
2. Explain the relationship between Christians as “living stones” and Jesus as “the living Stone.”
3. Propose a way to guard himself or herself against unholy behaviors.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. You, the Priest?
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Sanctified People (1 Peter 2:1–3)

- A. What to Abandon (v. 1)
- B. What to Seek (vv. 2–3)

#### II. Spiritual House (1 Peter 2:4–8)

- A. Living Stone (v. 4)
- B. Building Stones (v. 5)  
*Spiritual Excavation*
- C. Cornerstone (vv. 6–7)
- D. Stumbling Stone (v. 8)

#### III. Special People (1 Peter 2:9–12)

- A. Characterized (vv. 9–10)
- B. Challenged (vv. 11–12)

#### Conclusion

- A. Who Are We?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### How to Say It

MessiahMeh-sigh-uh.

SeptuagintSep-too-ih-jent.

# Introduction

## A. You, the Priest?

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1507. But 10 years after his ordination, Luther began to question the church's practices based on his reading of the Bible. He eventually led a group to withdraw and form churches independent from the authorities in Rome. In so doing, Luther and his followers abandoned the centuries-old tradition of needing priests for confession and prayer.

Rather than functioning as a hierarchy that elevated some persons (the clergy) above the level of the general membership of the church (the laity), Luther claimed that all Christians were priests. There was no division between the clergy and the laity. Any Christian could minister to another in ways that were seen before as the purview of priests alone. This meant that any Christian could effectively pray for another Christian. This teaching became known as the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers," which is still a central tenet of Protestant Christianity. Today's lesson takes us directly to one of Luther's guiding texts.

## B. Lesson Context

The 27 books of the New Testament include two ascribed to the apostle Peter. The first is particularly rich with citations from and allusions to various Old Testament passages. By one count, 1 Peter is tied for second place with Hebrews for having the highest percentage of verses that reflect Old Testament passages; only Revelation has a higher percentage. As a Jewish man, Peter knew the stories of his ancestors well. We see this in his use of several Old Testament imageries in his two letters.

Peter himself is a perplexing figure in the Gospel accounts. He tended to blurt out whatever was on his mind at the time, sometimes seeming to contradict himself in the process (examples: Matthew 16:22, 23; 26:35; Mark 9:5–6; John 18:25–27). He was impulsive and recklessly bold, often acting before thinking (Matthew 14:22–33; John 18:10). In short, Peter was an apostle to whom we can relate.

## I. Sanctified People

(1 Peter 2:1–3)

### A. What to Abandon (v. 1)

**1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.**

In this letter's first chapter, Peter described what it means to be "born again," the eternal condition of believers in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 1:23). Now he pivots (*wherefore*) to teach about the implications of this new condition: one of having been "purified" (1:22). Changes in behaviors and attitudes are vital.

Those in Peter's original audience had to outgrow the attitudes and behaviors of unbelievers. What comes next in the letter is called a "vice list." There are about two dozen such lists in the New Testament (Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5, 8–9; etc.). *Malice* carries the sense of evil actions in general. Such actions can be motivated by greed, spite, jealousy, or other moral failings; the resulting action intends to harm another person.

*Guile* is an orientation of general dishonesty. *Hypocrisies* characterize a person who will play whatever role is most beneficial to him or her. *Envies* characterize a bitter, restless spirit that begrudges the success or possessions of others; envy is the opposite of gratitude, of contentment with what God has given (see 1 Timothy 6:6–8).

*Evil speakings* reflects a word that is translated as “backbitings” in 2 Corinthians 12:20. Such behavior results from the previous three: a deceitful person who feigns friendship yet works behind the scenes to damage the reputation of others.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What criteria should you use to determine which vice is the most troubling to you personally?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Who could you ask to be a mentor for you in that regard?

### **B. What to Seek (vv. 2–3)**

#### **2. As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.**

As there are different levels of spiritual maturity, different foods are appropriate for those levels. These are described in more detail in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 and Hebrews 5:11–6:3. There is nothing wrong with the *milk of the word*; it is necessary and desirable for those who are spiritual infants. But its ingestion should lead to something important: *that ye may grow thereby* (compare 2 Peter 3:18).

The words translated “guile” in 1 Peter 2:1 and *sincere* here are the same word in Greek, with the letter *a* added to the beginning of the second occurrence. This additional letter expresses negation. We often express negation the same way in English (compare the opposites *historical* and *ahistorical*). Thus, human guile and the sincere Word of God are complete opposites.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What action must you take to keep growing spiritually?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Would an accountability partner help? Why, or why not?

#### **3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.**

Having *tasted* the goodness of God and having realized how *gracious* He has been should motivate the desire for change (compare Hebrews 6:5; Psalm 34:8). This could be something of a self-evaluation: if Peter’s original readers were not craving more of God’s kindness, had they even tasted it in the first place?

## **II. Spiritual House**

(1 Peter 2:4–8)

### **A. Living Stone (v. 4)**

#### **4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.**

*To whom coming* speaks of those who approach Jesus in obedience and worship. Based on what God has done in Christ, believers have the privilege of approaching the throne of God in

worship, praise, and petition (compare Hebrews 10:19–22). Thus, Peter has transitioned in his line of reasoning, with the focus now shifting from the believers to whom Peter was writing to the Lord himself.

This shift in focus comes through using Psalm 118:22, the first of several Old Testament texts cited as support (see Lesson Context). Jesus applied this passage to himself in Matthew 21:42. Peter also used it in his earliest preaching (Acts 4:11; compare Isaiah 28:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20).

As the focus shifts, so does the metaphor: from infants needing milk to a *stone*. *Living stone* is a metaphor for Christ, the one who conquered death. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension form the foundation of the Christian faith (compare 1 Corinthians 15:14; 1 Peter 1:18–21). The resurrection confirms Jesus as God’s *chosen* Messiah (Acts 2:36). The word *precious* indicates high value.

## **B. Building Stones (v. 5)**

**5. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.**

As rapidly as Peter shifts the focus away from his readers, he turns back to them. One stone does not make a building, and God’s spiritual house requires numerous other *lively stones*. Their identity is not in doubt, as witnessed by the opening phrase *ye also*.

The Greek word translated “living” in the previous verse is the same word translated *lively* here. Thus, “lively stones” can also be said to be “living stones.” Peter intended for his readers to envisage a *spiritual house* built of active believers in Christ.

This spiritual stone house is like a temple, where *spiritual sacrifices* are made, and Christians make up the *holy priesthood*. The concepts of priesthood and temple have not been done away with; instead, they have been transformed (compare Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Christians do not need the kind of priests the ancient Israelites did, because we now are priests ourselves as we serve under the great high priest, *Jesus Christ* (Hebrews 4:14).

## **Spiritual Excavation**

When we decided to build a fence, my wife and I learned a lesson in Alaskan geology: glacial valleys are densely laden with rocks. The rocky terrain significantly delayed the construction of our fence.

Following a day’s work that yielded only one hole, it became clear that we needed an auger. We rented one, but it was apparent that we needed something more powerful. An auger mounted on a backhoe proved adequate for our needs. Looking back, I can say that building the fence was easier than preparing the land to receive it.

Before Peter discussed constructing a spiritual house, he first addressed the need to clear the terrain. What needed to be removed were remnants of his readers’ sinful nature—things such as malice and hypocrisy. Construction would not be successful for those readers until that clearing occurred. What “terrain” in your life needs to be excavated to ensure your contribution to the building of the Lord’s spiritual house?

—J. M.

### C. Cornerstone (vv. 6–7)

**6. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.**

Peter demonstrated the value of *scripture* as he began to weave together several Old Testament texts. The passage quoted here is Isaiah 28:16. The quote doesn't read quite the same in our English version of Isaiah because Peter quoted from the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint.

*Sion* is, of course, Zion, which is Jerusalem (see the words used as parallel expressions in Psalm 102:21; etc.). The Greek phrase translated *corner stone* or some variant of it occurs several times in the New Testament (compare Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17).

The first stone laid in construction was the corner stone. If the structure was to endure, it was essential that the cornerstone be true on all sides and set into the ground so that it was level. The ancients used plumb lines to determine vertical trueness (see Amos 7:7–8) and trays of water to gauge horizontal levelness. A cornerstone needed to be without defects to guard against the potential for cracking. In Isaiah 28:16–17, this spiritual stone is measured to size by a standard of justice (judgment) and set to true vertical by the plumb line of righteousness (contrast 2 Kings 21:13).

**7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner.**

Here, in a quotation from Psalm 118:22, we see the second of the two uses in today's text of the cornerstone concept, worded as *head of the corner*. The two occurrences are entirely consistent in identifying this cornerstone as Jesus (compare Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20).

This second usage comes with a darker tone. For those who are *disobedient*, Jesus is *disallowed* as that cornerstone. Their faith is misplaced and mistaken. They are like the man who built his house on the sand rather than the rock (Matthew 7:24–27).

### D. Stumbling Stone (v. 8)

**8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.**

The first two phrases are parallel expressions from Isaiah 8:14. In Hebrew poetry, parallel lines often describe one thing by using two synonymous phrases. Thus, the *stone of stumbling* and the *rock of offence* are the same.

Compare the apostle Paul's use of this same Old Testament passage in Romans 9:33. In 1 Corinthians 1:23, he is most direct in identifying the crucified Christ as this stumbling block.

## III. Special People (1 Peter 2:9–12)

### A. Characterized (vv. 9–10)

**9a. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.**

The phrase *chosen generation* draws on the Septuagint version of Isaiah 43:20. The church has not been granted that status because of its accomplishments but because God selected it to be *a royal priesthood* (see discussion on 1 Peter 2:5, above; compare Exodus 19:6). In ancient Israel, those of royal lineage were separate and distinct from those in the priesthood. That

changed in the New Testament era. Christians are royalty because of our relationship with King Jesus. Christians are also priests in that we intercede for one another.

### **What Do You Think?**

How will the realization of your priestly responsibilities affect your prayer life?

### **Digging Deeper**

What can you help your church do to better inform its members of their priestly obligations?

#### **9b. An holy nation, a peculiar people.**

These descriptions speak of the church as a collection of believers rather than individuals who share the same beliefs. The wording comes from promises given to Israel that God's covenant people were to be unlike any other people in their dedication and service to Him and in His favor to them (Exodus 19:5–6; compare Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2).

Implied in being a *holy nation* is the obligation to maintain a holy lifestyle (1 Peter 1:15–16). The word *peculiar* is used in an older sense, “unique possession.” The church is the Lord's special, prized possession (Titus 2:14).

#### **9c. That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.**

The characteristics just described come together in their purpose: to show *praises* for the mighty deeds of the Lord (Isaiah 43:21). Peter emphasizes the personal nature of God's actions in that He has *called people out of darkness into his marvellous light*, a key theme in Scripture (9:2; John 8:12; etc.). When Christians fail to use that light to *shew forth the praises of him*, the countercultural power of the Christian faith is lost.

#### **10. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.**

Peter draws on Hosea 1:6, 9–10; 2:1, 23. These speak of faithless Israel's spiritual adultery. The Gentiles, for their part, had never been God's people just by definition. But in Christ, the reversal for both is completed: followers of Christ are *the people of God* and recipients of His *mercy*. In light of that, no persecution or suffering at the hands of enemies of the cross can ultimately prevail. God's forgiving mercy has allowed rebellious people to be restored so they can minister for the Lord and His church (2 Corinthians 4:1).

### **B. Challenged (vv. 11–12)**

#### **11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.**

As *strangers and pilgrims*, Christians are temporary residents of this world (compare 1 Peter 1:1, 17). Given this fact, why indulge in the world's *fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*? Because our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20), immoral rules and standards of the world are not to be embraced (Colossians 2:20–23).

#### **12. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

The word translated *conversation* is a favorite one of Peter's. He uses it eight times in his letters (1 Peter 1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Peter 2:7; 3:11)! It's an older word that means “behavior” or “lifestyle.” The idea is to give no ammunition to outsiders who want to attack the church for the hypocrisies of its members (1 Peter 2:1). Peter's expressed concern is for the

church's reputation and its members in the eyes of *Gentiles*. He does not mean Christians of Gentile background, but Gentile unbelievers and pagans. They should see only the *good works* of the church. If they are fair-minded, their disdain will change to admiration, attributing proper conduct to the Lord's influence.

*The day of visitation* may refer to something like the Old Testament's "Day of the Lord," a day of judgment. But another possibility is that it refers to the day the Lord visits an unbeliever with conviction driven by the Holy Spirit.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What are some ways you can sanctify your lifestyle so that it stands out more brightly in a sin-darkened world?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How do Matthew 5:14–16 and 6:1–4 influence your answer?

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Who Are We?**

This lesson contains important teachings about the nature of the church, but nothing is more important than this: if you are a Christian, Christ calls you to be a "priest" to other believers. That means ministering to and interceding for them without the need to secure permission or credentials. We are members of the kingdom of King Jesus, serving others as He would serve them.

Remember that we are a royal priesthood, ministering to one another. We are a holy nation, those who obediently try to follow God's will. We are redeemed from the curse of death by the gift of His own Son.

### **B. Prayer**

Holy God, we offer our loyalty, obedience, and service to You. May Your name be praised above all others, and may You build us into a holy church for Your glory. We pray this in the name of Your precious cornerstone, Jesus our Savior. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Live as God's chosen people.