

• Appeals for holiness – a holy people

• The picture is of a temple

The Church of God – like a building

1. It has a cornerstone

2. It has many other stones built into it

3. The building is a temple and has priests working within it

Three references from the Old Testament

1. Jesus is a cornerstone – Isaiah 28:16

Peter has been giving general appeals for holiness. Now he comes to his last appeal of this nature. God’s purpose is to bring into being a people with a unique and distinctive character^{□1}. It is because of God’s purpose to bring into being a holy people that he appeals to them to fight against the sinful nature and take steps to see that their behaviour is commendable in the eyes of pagan observers^{□2}. This is Peter’s last argument before he gets to some details of godly living (which start in 2:13).

□1 2:4-10

□2 2:11-12

In 2:4–5a the picture is of a temple; the people of God are a holy building. ‘Come close to him, to that living stone, rejected by people generally but in God’s sight chosen and precious’^{□1 a}.

□1 2:4

The Christians are to get close to Jesus, drawing near to Him in faith, and in worship. Peter uses a well-known Old Testament illustration. Jesus is a ‘living stone’. He is ‘living’ because He is alive from the dead. He is a ‘Stone’ because His people are built on Him. The church of God is like a building. I do not say that it ‘is’ a building; but it is ‘like’ a building.

1. **It has a cornerstone.** The picture was well-known to Jews. It imagines builders looking at a number of possible stones. One large stone is rejected but later it turns out to be the very one that is chosen. Jesus is the Stone. The Jewish leaders were the builders. They rejected Jesus as the foundation or cornerstone, but God used Him as the foundation and cornerstone of His Church. He is the key to God’s plan (‘chosen’) and greatly precious to God.

2. **It has many other stones built into it.** Christians are other living stones joined on to Jesus who is the greatest Stone in the building altogether. Peter continues: ‘Come and as living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, in order to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’^{□1}. The Christian must cooperate with God and allow Him to place them into position as stones in His living temple, the Church.

□1 2:5

3. **The building is a temple and has priests working within it.** Christians are the stones; but Christians are the priests also! In 2:5b the picture changes; the Christians are a company of priests offering sacrifices in the building. They are built into God’s people ‘in order to be a holy priesthood’. They offer sacrifices of praise, worship, self-offering, sacrificial service within God’s world. Living stones are built into the temple. Priests are working in the temple.

Next in 2:6–8 there is a string of three references to the Old Testament, all of which refer to Jesus as God’s ‘stone’.

1. **The first reference^{□1} confirms that Jesus is a cornerstone.** Peter mentioned a ‘stone’ before; now he makes it clear that the stone is a ‘cornerstone’.

□1 Isaiah 28:16

‘Because it is contained in Scripture:
“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone,
chosen and precious,
and the person who believes in him will not be put
to shame.”^{□2}

□2 2:6

A ‘cornerstone’ was a large stone on the first layer of the building into which many other stones were fitted.

2. Christ the key to destiny – Psalm 117:22

2. The second reference^{□1} shows Christ is the key to destiny. Peter continues: ‘This precious treasure, then, belongs to you who believe’ (2:7a; this line is difficult to translate^b). He continues: ‘. . . but for the people who are unbelieving, “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner of the building”^{□2}’.

□1 Psalm 117:22
□2 2:7b

Jesus is the key to rising or falling. For some Jesus is priceless valuable. To others He is to be rejected. Yet God uses Him as the foundation of His Church, the One who holds everyone up and holds everyone together.

3. Christ the key to destiny – Isaiah 8:14

3. The third reference^{□1} also shows Christ to be the key to destiny. Peter continues: ‘. . . and “A stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall”. For they stumble because they disobey the word; to this also they were appointed’^{□2}’.

□1 Isaiah 8:14
□2 2:8

• Disobedience brings disaster

The very One who saves some is the occasion of a fall for others. They disobey the word. Their stumbling is the punishment of their disobedience. When Peter says ‘To this also they were appointed’, it does not mean the sin is appointed; it means that the punishment is appointed. Nor was it appointed ‘before the foundation of the world’. Rather it was appointed in God’s many announcements in human history that disobedience to His word will bring disaster.

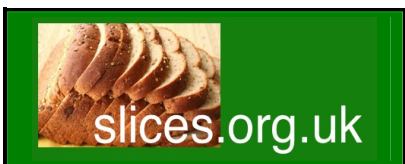
A community like a holy temple fit for God to live in

Peter’s main point is that God is seeking to bring into being a community of people who are like a holy temple fit for God to dwell in. The pathway of holiness will involve cooperating with God in being the people that He is seeking to bring into being. Holiness is corporate as well as individual. It is not only being a consecrated person; it is participating in being a holy, living building for God to dwell in. It is sharing in the work of a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God.

Footnotes

a Are these lines are commands (‘Come to him ... and let yourselves be built...’) or statements (‘Coming to him ... even you yourselves are being built...’)? The first two words of verse 5 (‘...even ... yourselves’) seem too heavily emphatic if the sentence is a statement. More probably, the ‘and’ follows naturally after an imperatival participle, in the first word of verse 4. An imperatival particle is found also in 2:18.

b The traditional translation is: ‘To you who believe He is precious’. Strictly, Greek *he time* is the subject of the sentence. It could mean ‘This honour’ but there is obviously a connection with *entimon* in verse 6. The sense therefore is ‘This precious treasure’. In the long run the traditional translation is right!



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