

# Christ the Stone

Christ is portrayed in both the Old and New Testaments as a **STONE**, a metaphor (see [imagery of stone in Bible](#)) which depicts among other attributes, His strength, His reliability, His stability.

The first mention of Christ as **STONE** is in Genesis, in Jacob's parting blessing to Joseph, where Moses records that Joseph's "bow remained firm, and his arms were agile, (How? It was) from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob. From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." (Ge 49:24-[note](#)) Notice how aged Jacob "piles up" three great names of God which attest to the strength of the **MIGHTY ONE**, the sustenance of the **SHEPHERD** (Jacob's "Shepherd all his life" Ge 48:15) and the **STONE** Who gives "grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16-note). In Ge 35:9-15 God's presence and promise of help prompted Jacob to set up a **STONE** of remembrance, a practice all saints would do well to emulate after experiencing the good hand of the Lord on their life!

## **EBENEZER: STONE OF HELP**

In Genesis 49:24 the Hebrew word for **STONE** is **EBEN**, which reminds us of the **STONE'S** help to Israel in His defeat of the Philistines, prompting Samuel to take "a stone (eben) and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and name it **EBEN-EZER** (STONE OF HELP [ezer = help]), saying, "**HITHERTO** (up to this time) hath the LORD HELPED (ezer) us." (1Sa 7:12KJV-note) The name "Eben-Ezer" recalls the line in the well known hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" in which we sing "Here I raise my EBENEZER," my Stone of Help. Indeed, His Name is Jesus, the Stone of Israel. Dear saint, can you sing "HITHERTO" regarding your Stone's help? May the Spirit bring to our minds past times of great deliverance by our Stone of Help, so that we might each raise a memorial to the enduring faithfulness and mercy of our covenant-keeping God, our Stone of Help, Christ Jesus. Amen

## **HITHERTO**

Spurgeon adds that "**HITHERTO** is like a hand pointing in the direction of the past. Twenty years or seventy, and yet, "hitherto the Lord hath helped!" Through poverty, through wealth, through sickness, through health, at home, abroad, on the land, on the sea, in honor, in dishonor, in perplexity, in joy, in trial, in triumph, in prayer, in temptation, "HITHERTO hath the Lord helped us!" We delight to look down a long avenue of trees. It is delightful to gaze from end to end of the long vista, a sort of verdant temple, with its branching pillars and its arches of leaves. Even so look down the long aisles of your years, at the green boughs of mercy overhead, and the strong pillars of lovingkindness and faithfulness which bear up your joys. Are there no birds in yonder branches singing? Surely there must be many, and they all sing of mercy received "HITHERTO." But the word also points forward, for when a man gets up to a certain mark and writes "HITHERTO," he is not yet at the end. There is still a distance to be traversed. More trials, more joys; more temptations, more triumphs; more prayers, more answers; more toils, more strength; more fights, more victories; and then come sickness, old age, disease, death. Is it over now? No! there is more yet-awakening in Jesus' likeness, thrones, harps, songs, psalms, white raiment, the face of Jesus, the society of saints, the glory of God, the fulness of eternity, the infinity of bliss. O be of good courage, believer, and with grateful confidence raise thy "Ebenezer," for—He who hath helped thee hitherto, Will help thee all thy journey through." When read in heaven's light how glorious and marvelous a prospect will thy "HITHERTO" unfold to thy grateful eye!"

## **LIVING STONE**

**Peter** (petros = stone) uses the metaphor of stone in his first letter, addressing believers as those who are "coming to Him (Christ) as to a **LIVING STONE**, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God." (1Peter 2:4-note). Christ, the Living Stone, has "been raised from the dead, never to die again." (Ro 6:9-note) and so unlike dead stones, He is forever the Source of "LIVING hope" to those who are born again "through the LIVING and abiding Word of God" by which they themselves become "LIVING STONES, who are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1Pe 1:3-note, 1Pe 1:23-note, 1Pe 2:5-note). Spurgeon writes that we should "be always coming to Christ as to a Living Stone--we have come to Him (for salvation), and we are coming to Him and we keep on coming to Him, sinking down, settling in, resting on our Living Stone, always pressing closely upon Christ." In short, drawing near to Christ is not only drawing near for salvation, but drawing near in intimate, abiding, personal fellowship and communion with Christ. Beloved, are you coming to Him day by day, moment by moment, depending solely on your Stone's strength, reliability, and stability?

## **CHOICE STONE CORNER STONE**

Peter then quotes Isaiah 28:16-[note](#) writing "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice **STONE**, a precious **CORNER STONE** and he who believes in Him shall never (in Greek this is a double negative!) be **PUT TO SHAME**." (1Peter 2:6-note) As Spurgeon writes "Christians will be tested by the flesh. Natural desires will break into vehement lusts and SHAME will seek to throw us down. Will

believers then perish? No! There will be losses and crosses, business trials and domestic bereavements. What then? We will not be PUT TO SHAME; our Lord will sustain us under every trial. At last death will come. People will wipe the cold sweat from our brows. We will gasp for breath, but we will not be PUT TO SHAME. We may not be able to shout "Victory," and we may be too weak to sing triumphant hymns, but with our last breath we will whisper the Precious Name of our Living Stone. They that watch will know by our peace that a Christian does not die but only melts into everlasting life. Beloved, we will never be put to shame, even amid the grandeur of eternity" because we have a **CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE!**

### **STONE OF STUMBLING**

Finally, in 1Peter 2:7-8-note, Peter quotes from Psalms and Isaiah writing that "This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The STONE which the builders rejected (means they put Him to the test and completely rejected Him as unfit, unqualified, unapproved!), this became the very CORNER STONE" (quoting Ps 118:22-note) and "a STONE of stumbling and Rock of offense (Gk = skandalon literally is that part of a trap on which the bait was laid, when touched caused the trap to close on its prey - see Michael Card's song below). "They stumble because they disobey the Word and to doom they were appointed." (quoting Isa 8:14-note) Jesus' commentary on this passage is "he who falls on this STONE will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (Read Mt 21:42-45) The paradoxical picture is that the perfect Lamb of God, the Creator of the Universe, was rejected by His creation, men who had carefully evaluated the perfect God Man and found Him not "passing their test"! What a striking contrast with the scene John witnessed in heaven "And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." (Rev 5:11-12-note)! And all God's people cry "Amen!"

### **A REJECTED STONE**

There is a famous Jewish legend which describes the building of the first Temple. Each stone was shaped at a distant quarry and marked to fit perfectly into place at the temple building site. However one huge stone didn't seem to fit anywhere, and the builders placed it to the side. After the foundation had been laid, the time came to hoist the corner stone into place. Word was sent to the quarry, but the masons replied that the corner stone had already been delivered. It was the very stone they had rejected! When it was retrieved, it slid perfectly into place, serving to hold all the other stones in their proper position! Spurgeon comments "And so it was with Christ Jesus, the Living Stone. The builders cast Him away. He was a plebeian (commoner). He was of poor extraction. He was a Man acquainted with sinners, Who walked in poverty and meanness; hence the worldly-wise despised Him (Isa 53:3). But when God shall gather together, in one, all things that are in heaven and that are in earth, then Christ shall be the glorious consummation of all things." (Eph 1:10KJV-note)

### **A COMING STONE**

In **Daniel 2:31-49** we read of a great "STONE cut out without hands" which struck the statute representing the Gentile kingdoms, crushing them into oblivion. (Da 2:34-note) Then "the STONE that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (Da 2:35-note) Most commentators agree the STONE is Christ, Who will return as the victorious King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16-note) and establish His everlasting kingdom which will fill the whole earth (Da 2:34, 44-note).

And so from Genesis to Revelation, we see Christ is portrayed as the Saving Stone, the Slighted Stone, the Stumbling Stone, the Smiting Stone, and the soon coming Sovereign Stone. **Maranatha** (Our Lord, Come!). **Hosanna** (Save now, we pray). Amen

Here is Fernando Ortega's beautiful version of **Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing**-notice that he replaces the original words "Hitherto, I raise my Ebenezer" with "Hitherto, Thy love has blessed me."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwOT9L60cBA>

Here is Michael Card's powerful portrayal of Jesus as "Scandalon"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ\\_ngvEmxaQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ_ngvEmxaQ)

### **SCANDALON**

The seers & the prophets had foretold it long ago  
That the long awaited One would make men stumble  
But they were looking for a king to conquer & to kill  
Who'd have ever thought He'd be so meek & humble.

He will be the Truth that will offend them one & all  
A STONE that makes men stumble  
A ROCK that makes them fall.  
Many will be broken so that He can make them whole  
And many will be crushed & lose their own soul.

Along the path of life there lies a stubborn Scandalon  
And all who come this way must be offended.  
To some He is a barrier, To others He's the Way  
For all should know the scandal of believing.

It seems today the Scandalon offends no one at all  
The image we present can be stepped over.  
Could it be that we are like the others long ago.

## IMAGE OF STONE

Discussion of the image of a stone - from [The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery](#) (on internet - an outstanding resource)

**STONE** - Nothing could be more lifeless than a stone. Selected and displayed in a prominent place, however, a stone can bear a message and almost become personified. Thus Joshua's stone at Shechem "heard all the words of the LORD; ... therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God" (Josh 24:27 NRSV). Stones appear as witnesses in other passages as well. A covenant is made, a sacrificial meal eaten, and stones serve as witnesses (Gen 31:44–54). Archaeologists have uncovered several circles of stones (some with eyes or hands on them) almost certainly representing witnesses to covenants or other religious rites.

Stone imagery primarily conveys the concept of lifelessness. When Moses received the Ten Commandments, they were written on tablets of stone, a fact that seemed to prophets of a later generation symbolic of hard, unresponsive hearts: "I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26 NRSV; cf. Jer 31:33). Paul took up the contrast between "the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets," and the greater glory of the ministry of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:7–8 NRSV; see Holy Spirit), which transformed lives.

Stones of great density and weight are a powerfully destructive force when set in motion. A stone cut out "not by human hands" strikes the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue, shattering the gold, silver and other layers that represent world empires. This supernatural stone grows to fill the earth and is depicted as God's invincible kingdom (Dan 2:34–44). The stone endures, whereas successive world kingdoms fall, never to rise again. That unchanging, enduring quality lies behind Jacob's name for God, the Rock (KJV: "stone of Israel," Gen 49:24).

That Jesus was tempted to turn wilderness stones into bread is significant. Satan's temptation was to do something that would have immediate appeal. But God does not need to stoop to "bread and circuses" to gain a following.

Appropriately, the Lord's temple was built of costly dressed stone (1 Kings 5:17), a building material more enduring than manufactured brick. It was meant to stand for the truth—God is with us—and indeed the Lord said to Solomon when the temple was consecrated, "My eyes and my heart will be there for all times" (1 Kings 9:3 NRSV).

But that unique privilege carried with it the fearsome implications of God's holiness. If his people turned aside from following him as Lord, Israel would be cut off from their land and the temple would become a heap of ruins (1 Kings 9:6–9). Isaiah was aware that this threat would soon be carried out: "The LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy.... He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against" (Is 8:13–14). The same God becomes both a sanctuary and a stone to trip over, depending on the response people make to his holiness. Those who make the Most High their dwelling place will find his angels keeping them from stumbling against this stone (Ps 91:12; cf. Mt 4:6). Moreover, God's purpose for Jerusalem will be fulfilled, despite the intrigues of Israel's leaders (Is 28:14).

God's future purpose, revealed to Isaiah, was to lay in Zion "a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation" (Is 28:16 NRSV) and to use builders of justice and righteousness. The cornerstone here is part of the foundation,

whereas in other contexts it could be the key top stone (Zech 4:7, 9). The NT makes use of both senses. The top stone of an arch or pediment proved that the architect's instruction had been carried out and so exactly illustrated the work of Christ, the "living stone" (1 Pet 2:4). Peter also quotes Psalm 118:22: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner" (1 Pet 2:7 NRSV) together with Isaiah 8:14. These references were linked by the first Christians because they point to Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Scriptures (cf. Acts 4:11); though their Messiah had caused division and was rejected by many, this had been predicted. Jesus himself was the source of this application of Psalm 118:22, to which he added a reference to the stone of Daniel 2:34: "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls" (Lk 20:17–18). This dreadful picture of judgment from the lips of Jesus is found only in the Gospels.

Paul conflated Isaiah 28:16 and Isaiah 8:14 to explain Israel's failure to accept righteousness through faith; they had stumbled whereas Gentiles had believed (Rom 9:33). In Ephesians 2:20–21 he draws on the temple-building metaphor to construct his famous vision of the church, made up of believers from far and wide, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:20–21 NRSV).

In Nehemiah 4:2 Sanballat asks, regarding the Jewish returnees' efforts at rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, "Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble-burned as they are?" (NIV). This is an interesting metaphor in relation to Peter, who would add that individual believers are "like living stones" (1 Pet 2:5). Meditation on his name had perhaps convinced him that he was not the only one who would be called Peter, a stone.

Mention should be made, finally, that stones are a unifying motif in the story of Jacob as narrated in Genesis, embodying important facets of this hero's life and personality.

See also BRICKS; BUILD, BUILDING; CORNERSTONE; ROCK; STONING; STUMBLE, STUMBLING BLOCK.