

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Rejected, Chosen Cornerstone

by Dan Trygg

“Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³² Why? Because they sought not by faith, but as out from works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ just as it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’, and ‘he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ ^{Romans 10:1} Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for salvation. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with true-knowledge. ³ For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ...the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’” Romans 9:31-10:3,11

Paul had been discussing how the Gentiles had discovered the righteousness of God, a freely-offered gift purchased through Christ’s death and resurrection. ***This righteousness was made available by God’s grace, and was received by faith.*** It had nothing to do with the righteousness of the person who accepted it. ***It was about what Christ did for them, not about their level of righteousness in coming to Him.***

This is in contrast to the righteousness found in the Law, on which the Jews were focused. ***They were trying to establish their own righteousness by keeping the the Law.*** They thought they would receive life through their obedience, but instead they received the condemnation, judgment and spiritual death which came from their disregard of God as their Source. ***Striving in their own self-discipline and religious performance brought them no life, ...but it did feed a religious pride.*** The more heroic and extreme their religious performance, the more they felt convinced that they *were*, indeed, God’s elite, ...and the more they opposed the message of the gospel. ***They had stumbled over the stumbling stone (Isa. 8:14,15) ...disregarding God’s way of salvation in favor of making their own solution.***

[As we have seen before, the key to understanding Romans 9-11 is to recognize when Paul was quoting from the OT scriptures, and being careful to look up each passage to see what each citation or allusion was *meant* to say. Romans 9:33 is a good example of this. It is a combination of two separate quotations, Isaiah 8:14,15 and 26:18. Each quotation has its own context, and very different messages, even though they seem to have a common theme and are combined in one verse here.]

The Jews had not recognized that, while *they were pursuing their own way*, God “was placing a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious or costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.” This was a prophecy from Isaiah 28:16. In that context, God was about to allow the enemies of Judah conquer the land, destroy the temple, and take the people into exile. Yet, ***God speaks of laying a cornerstone, ...the first stone to be laid for a future building project.*** Clearly, God was saying that He was *not* done with Israel. He had future plans for them. Then, regarding this “cornerstone from Judah”, God makes the statement, “the one who *believes in it/him* will not be put to shame.” Salvation will come *not* from *their strategies or efforts*, but in *trusting in the “Cornerstone” God would bring.*

Zechariah 10 is a prophecy about how God will scatter the people of Israel and Judah among the nations. ***Yet, Yahweh will make the house of Judah like a war horse, a cornerstone, a tent peg.*** God will strengthen the Jews, and bring them back. ***The cornerstone, here, will come from Judah.*** They will be mighty men of war, treading down their enemies, because Yahweh will be with them. ***God will bring them back, because He will have compassion on them*** (vs. 6; cf. Hos. 1:6,7; 2:23).

This is the same Hebrew word used in Psalm 118:22, “the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” This psalm is a celebration of the faithful-love of Yahweh, ...a declaration that *it is better to take refuge in Yahweh* than to trust in men (vs. 8). In spite of being surrounded by enemies, or being violently attacked, ***Yahweh will help and will provide deliverance and salvation.*** God had disciplined the writer severely, but had not delivered him to death. He believed that God was *for* him, and would open to him the gates of righteousness. ***God Himself would take the stone rejected by the builders, and make it the chief cornerstone.*** This is Yahweh’s doing, and it is marvelous (the Hebrew means “extraordinary, incomprehensible, miraculous”). ***THIS is the day that Yahweh has made, we will rejoice and be glad in IT!*** This prophetic proclamation is followed by the petition, “Hosanna!”, which means “Save us now!”, and then the declaration, “Blessed is the one who come in the name of Yahweh.” (vs. 26).

This last passage was fulfilled in Jesus’ triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. As Jesus came into the city riding on a colt (a prophetic sign of the coming of Israel’s humble king – Zech. 9:9), ***the crowd began to cry out, “Hosanna!, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”*** (Jn. 12:13-15) ***Everyone there understood that this was addressing Jesus as though He were the King of Israel.*** They even called Him the son of David, another Messianic title (Matt. 21:9). On the following day, when the chief priests and Pharisees gathered to challenge His authority, Jesus confronted

and exposed *them*, quoting from Psalm 118:22,23 and Isaiah 8:14:15, “Have you never read in the Scriptures, ‘the stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from *you*, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. ‘And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.’” Jesus cites from two very different passages of scripture to make His point, much as Paul does. The expectation was that His listeners would be familiar with the original contexts. **Clearly, He is warning them that they are about to reject Him, the true Cornerstone. By doing this, they would stumble over Him, and be broken in pieces, and come to ruin.**

The next time this word picture was used is in Acts 4. On trial before the Sanhedrin, the same Jewish high council that had condemned Jesus just weeks before, for healing a lame man in the name of Jesus, Peter declares, “...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ (Messiah) the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead -- by *this* name this man stands here before you in good health. ¹¹ **He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very cornerstone...**” (Acts 4:10-11). Certainly, Jesus’ own words from just a couple of months before would have been coming to their minds.

Paul used the same word picture in the letter to the Ephesians, written a short time after the book of Romans. Here, **he uses this in support of his argument for unity, instead of divergency.** Here, **his argument is that in Christ, both Jew and Gentile have been brought together.** Jesus had removed the barriers and the enmity, which had been a result of the Law and ordinances of Judaism. He reconciled both groups into one new humanity, thus establishing peace through Jesus. We Gentiles, who were on the outside as aliens, now have been brought near, and we both have our access to the Father through Him. So, **we are no longer strangers and outsiders, but** are fellow-citizens with the saints, and **are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone** (2:11-20). This is probably an allusion to Isaiah 28:16, which seems to have a forward-looking perspective to the purpose of the Cornerstone. A new “house” is in view, not limited to Israel.

Finally, Peter cites many of these same OT passages in his argument in I Peter 2:4-10, “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ **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. ⁶ **For this is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.’** ⁷ Honor, then, is for you who believe. But **for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone,’** ⁸ and, **‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’**; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this consequential-doom they were also appointed. ⁹ But *you are a chosen race*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, 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.*” Notice that **in verse 6, the quote is from Isaiah 28:16**, but **verse 7 cites Psalm 118:22**, and **verse 8 refers to Isaiah 8:14,15**. Again, **to clearly understand what Peter is trying to communicate, you would need to look each passage up and see what it says in its original context.** [Note, too, the citation to Hosea 2:23, as in Romans 9:25]

When you put all of this together, what do you come up with? Jesus is the choice, precious, tested and firmly planted Cornerstone. He was rejected by the religious leaders (the “builders”) of His day, but God Himself overruled their rejection and ESTABLISHED HIM as Head of the Corner, the Chief Cornerstone. **Those who come to Him and believe on Him for their salvation, find life. They build their lives upon Him as their foundation, and in so doing they are also built into Him.** They become part of God’s family, God’s house, a holy nation, a chosen (‘choice’) people. **What do they believe? That Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior-King sent from God. What has He called them to? To be “built up into a spiritual house”, ...being built upon the apostolic foundation and upon Christ as the Cornerstone.** The key is to be rightly-related to Jesus. We are also to remain true to the apostolic teachings, contained in the NT. **Build your life on Jesus, ...in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. It also implies that we are to be built into community.** We are living stones, says Peter, being built *together* into a spiritual house (I Peter. 2:4,5). **We are being built up to become a people for God’s purposes, ...especially to represent Him to the world by word and by deed. He is looking for people who will demonstrate and proclaim His excellencies to the world around us.**

Finally, our response to Jesus will determine our destiny. Either, we will believe in Him, and become His people, or we will reject Him and become rejected. If we believe, the Scripture says that **we will not be disappointed, or put to shame.** If we reject Him, we will experience loss, doom, destruction, shame and disappointment. **He is looking for people who will build their lives on Him, and are allowing Him to build them according to His desire and specifications. Are you willing to build and be built in that way? Will you choose Him as your Cornerstone?**