

THE REJECTED STONE AND THE LIVING STONES: Psalm 118:22–23 and New Testament Christology and Ecclesiology

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The dramatic climax of the Gospel of Matthew begins with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The events that follow in Matthew 21 are filled with Old Testament imagery and allusions. His entrance into the city deliberately evokes the coronation of the son of David, Solomon, who similarly rode in upon David's mule to the joyous celebration of the crowds (1 Kings 1:32–40).

Matthew asserts almost explicitly that Jesus is fulfilling the royal-messianic prophecies of both Isaiah (62:11) and Zechariah (9:9), and he depicts the crowd paying Jesus royal homage, laying their garments on the ground for him to walk on (compare 2 Kings 9:13). The evangelist also has the crowds singing the last of Israel's great Hallel ("thanksgiving") psalms in praise of Jesus: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:9; Ps. 118:26).¹

The action continues with a series of symbolic words and deeds from Jesus, again all colored by Old Testament associations. He cleanses the Temple of money-changers and heals the blind and the lame; and he delivers a series of pointed parables that underscore the hostility and rejection of Israel's religious leaders—the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees.

The chapter concludes with Jesus himself appealing to a "scriptural proof text from the Psalms"²:

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.

¹ The "Hallel" psalms are Psalms 113–118. On the patterns of Davidic fulfillment in Matthew see Brian M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God: The Christology of Matthew 1-2 in the Setting of the Gospel*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 23 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1979)

² W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew*, 3 vols., The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 3:184.

And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him. (Matt. 21:42–44)

Jesus here quite explicitly applies Psalm 118:22 to himself. In bold fashion, he declares that he is the “stone” rejected by the “builders,” whom he identifies with Israel’s leaders. He also here seems to apply this psalm to his passion and resurrection. His rejection is his passion and death, which is vindicated by the “marvelous” work of God who will raise him from the dead and make him the cornerstone of some new building or temple.

All three synoptic Gospels attest to Jesus quoting Psalm 118:22 in association with his final teaching at Jerusalem (see Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17). And this exegetical reading—that Jesus is the “stone” and that his rejection represents his passion while his resurrection and ascension mark his establishment as the cornerstone of the Church—was a commonplace in the early Church, beginning within the pages of the New Testament (see Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7–9).

From the beginnings of the Christian interpretative tradition, then, Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 118 was understood both christologically and ecclesologically. That is to say: Jesus was understood to be here saying something about himself as Israel’s Messiah, as well as describing the Church as the Temple or building of God, built-up by the apostles upon the foundation of him as the corner-stone.

This exegesis—begun in the New Testament, developed in the writings of the Fathers, and affirmed by successive ecumenical councils over the centuries—has in turn become the authoritative interpretation of the Catholic Church, articulated most recently by the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) and by the post-conciliar *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993):

The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity. This edifice has many names to describe it ... especially, the holy Temple. This Temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it. It is this holy city that is seen by John as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.³

3 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* [The Light of Nations], Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (November 21, 1964), 6, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (Piscataway, NJ: New Century, 1966); compare *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d. ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 756.

My purpose in this article is to return to the biblical sources of this ancient ecclesiological teaching of the Church. Through a biblical-theological reflection on the scriptural texts, I hope to illuminate the development of this self-understanding of the Church's identity and mission. As I hope to show, this self-understanding of the Church as a holy Temple is, to a certain extent, rooted in Christ's own self-understanding as expressed in his use of Psalm 118:22–23.

My method will be as follows: I will begin by attempting to recover the original context and meaning of Psalm 118. I also want to look at the broader "theology of the stone" evidenced in the Old Testament—especially in the prophets—and consider the relation of this tradition to the stone imagery of Psalm 118. Following that, I will outline some general observations about the use of the Psalter in the New Testament before examining in detail the context for Jesus' use of Psalm 118:22–23 in Matthew 21. Finally, I will explore the beginnings of the interpretative history of Psalm 118:22–23 in the New Testament, focusing in particular on the interpretation of this text in 1 Peter 2:4–10. I will conclude with a few observations about New Testament christology and ecclesiology as suggested by this study.

Psalm 118 and Nehemiah's Rebuilding of the Walls

Almost all modern exegetes agree that Psalm 118 is a "song of thanksgiving" intended to be sung by the Hebrew community as a whole. Its purpose is to celebrate and give thanks for God's salvation of the people from some national distress. The structure of the psalm dances between the individual and the community, both of whom express their thanksgiving to God for favors received. There is a strong indication of a festal procession and of a hero being acclaimed from the Temple, a hero who has been harassed by personal enemies or the nation's enemies or both.

Scholarly agreement ends there. There are more than two dozen serious proposals as to the possible original setting and circumstances of the psalm. It is beyond my purposes here to evaluate these various options.⁴ For the purposes of this article, I suggest that while the psalm may have originated in the context of the monarchy, and hence before the destruction of the kingdom and the exile, its importance for the New Testament opens up when it is understood in association with the Tabernacle feast of 444 B.C. after the restoration of Jerusalem's walls following Israel's return from exile (Neh. 6:15–16; 8:13–18; 12:27). The cornerstone verse in the psalm, I believe, may have been an addition by Nehemiah himself, the post-exilic governor of Judea and builder of Jerusalem's walls.

Historically, the rebuilding of the walls would have proven to both Israel and its neighbors that God was on their side. The much maligned and rejected people had managed to find victory against all odds and had rebuilt their Temple and city.

4 For an overview of the various scholarly proposals, see Andrew C. Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John: An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 158. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 23–26.

In addition to the historical similarities of concern, in both the original Hebrew and in the Septuagint translation there are particularly rich spiritual and linguistic points of contact between the biblical memoir of the rebuilding in Nehemiah and psalm.⁵

The stone rejected by the builders which proved to be the keystone is realized on many different levels among the Jews of Nehemiah's time. The stone could mean the Jews as a people, the Law, the walls restored, and even Nehemiah himself as a person. Thus, the psalm verse both reflects and is reflected in the life of the people and their faith.

Psalm 118 speaks of a stone rejected, while Nehemiah tells us that the Samaritans ridiculed the Israelites' efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. Indeed, Nehemiah 4:2 reports the taunt of a certain Sanballat: "What are these feeble Jews doing? ... Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" I suggest that the psalm may be alluding to that historical situation. The stones are probably the charred and half-destroyed walls of Jerusalem at that time.

The psalm goes on to sing of the rejected stone becoming the keystone and that this remarkable turn of events marked a "day which the LORD has made" (Ps. 118:24). Nehemiah 6:15 affirms that the walls, despite the Samaritans' scorn, were finished on a certain day and that in all they had taken only fifty-two days to rebuild—a marvelous achievement that apparently astonished surrounding peoples. Compare the summary text in Nehemiah to the psalm passage quoted by Christ:

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations round about us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. (Neh. 6:15–16)

The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. (Ps. 118:22–23)

5 For the details of my argument for an original setting of 444 B.C., after the repair of the Jerusalem walls, see my *Christ the Rejected Stone: A Study of Psalm 118, 22–23, Biblical and Ecclesiological Implications* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1974), 31–61. Other scholars who agree with this setting for the psalm are: Alexander F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 3 vols., The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1903), 3:693; Friedrich Baethgen, *Die Psalmen* [The Psalms], 2d ed. (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897), 347; Michel Berder, "La Pierre Rejetée par les Bâisseurs": *Psaume 118, 22–23 et son Emploi dans les Traditions Juives et dans le Nouveau Testament* ["The Stone Rejected by the Builders": Psalm 118:22–23 and its Use in Jewish Traditions and in the New Testament] *Études Bibliques* 31 (Paris: Gabalda, 1996), 89, 105; John James Steward Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (London: Bell and Daldy, 1868), 2:287.

To reconstruct the walls of a large city in such a short time is truly a marvel, especially given that the Jews were undermanned and had to remain constant on the alert for enemy attacks. When Psalm 118 speaks of the “marvelous work” of God, it might very well be referring to the rebuilding of the walls.

We also know from Nehemiah’s memoirs that the successful completion of the wall was a motive for a great celebration in Israel—in the form of a procession along the walls, which took place near the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 12:27–43). Psalm 118 has the literary form of a triumphal procession and contains specific allusions to tents and procession branches, suggesting an autumn harvest feast or specifically, Tabernacles. We know, too, from later Israelite history, that this psalm was particularly associated with Tabernacles.

The psalm speaks of people shouting from the Temple and the hero entering it; that hero very well could have been Nehemiah. Although there is no perfect historical correspondence, like the “hero” depicted in the psalm, Nehemiah was pressed by his enemies and then saved. Like the hero in the psalm, his victory is celebrated by a procession and a passing through the gates. These associations are also supported by the grammatical connections in both the Hebrew and Septuagint texts between Nehemiah’s original prayer in Nehemiah 1:11 (O LORD ... give success to your servant today) and the petition in Psalm 118:25 (O LORD ... give us success!).⁶

My point in this quick comparison of Nehemiah and Psalm 118 is that whatever its original setting, the psalm was likely used at Nehemiah’s liturgical celebration of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. There could well have been earlier post-exilic historical occasions for the psalm’s use, such as the foundation ceremony of the Temple in Zerubbabel’s time (Ezra 3:6–7, 10–13; Zech. 4:7; Hag. 2:3–5) or the actual completion of the Temple (Ezra 6:15). But what is also clear is that the life and work of the Jews in Nehemiah’s time constitute an authentic historical incarnation of the cornerstone referred to in Psalm 118:22–23. The psalm, then, could represent Nehemiah’s celebration of his own victory over his enemies with God’s help.

This Nehemian context helps us to make some suggestions as to the meaning of the cornerstone alluded to in Psalm 118:22–23. The key is the phrase “it is marvelous (*niph’lā’t’h*) in our eyes.” *Niph’lā’t’h* has a two-fold meaning. It is something difficult (Jer. 32:37; Zech. 8:4–6) and it is something marvelous (2 Sam. 1:26). The prophecies of Jeremiah and Zechariah about the impossibility yet the marvel of Israel’s renovation seem culminated in the *niph’lā’t’h* of Psalm 118:22–23. The

6 Others have noted the connections between Neh. 1:11 and Ps. 118:25. Brunson, who argues for an original setting for the psalm in the period of the monarchy, suggests that Nehemiah “echoes the well-known psalm as a paradigm for his own situation.” In general, Brunson believes that while Ps. 118 was likely used at Nehemiah’s Tabernacles festival, it was not “created especially for that festival.” See *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John*, 25, n. 20.

cornerstone captures the whole idea of abandonment then life, rejection then glory. Yet only the eyes of faith can see it.

Here we see still another meaning for the rejected stone—the Jews themselves as the chosen people who are restored to their land after exile and ridicule. Their sureness in their election helps them to see the events around them as signs of favor from God. The vision of the surrounding nations at their successful reconstruction of the walls is one of astonished envy (see Neh. 6:16). Yet for the Jews it is one of wonder and thanksgiving (Ps. 118:22–23). If there is a real historic connection between Nehemiah 6:16 and our psalm verse, the so-called “stone” would be the same for both peoples: namely, the successful reconstruction of the walls. But the peoples’ reactions are completely different. While both recognize that the event is from God, the Jews are glad, but the surrounding peoples can only be envious and afraid.

The “Rock” of Salvation and Stumbling

If the historical setting of Psalm 118 cannot be established with absolute certainty, by the time of the New Testament the psalm has clearly taken on a “messianic” interpretation. Jesus’ use of the psalm in Matthew is definitely “messianic”—interpreting the psalm in light of his own person and mission. The question, historically, is how the psalm came to be understood in this light. Andrew Brunson states the historical problem succinctly:

There is no extant pre-rabbinic interpretation of Psalm 118:22 that is explicitly messianic or eschatological. ... It is possible that this verse was interpreted messianically prior to its use in the New Testament, and it would be somewhat surprising for it to gain such importance in the early apologetic if there was no messianic association to begin with; but as there is no clear evidence, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions.⁷

The issues involved are complicated and should not detain us here. All that we can establish with certainty is that Psalm 118 was significant in the liturgy of Israel, especially in celebrating Tabernacles and Passover. For our purposes I think it will suffice to presume that throughout the Second Temple period, Psalm 118 increasingly came to be associated with a cluster of other biblical texts in which the image of a *stone* figures prominently. In the prophets, especially in Isaiah, this image increasingly came to take on messianic importance. Indeed, as we will see, Jesus joins his quotation of Psalm 118:22–23 to a stone image likely drawn from Isaiah and Daniel—an image that was widely understood as having messianic

⁷ Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John*, 41.

meaning.⁸ Thus, we need to examine these stone metaphors before turning to the New Testament.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is associated with the title “Rock.” God is the Rock of sure foundation upon which Israel must place its trust. God is the Rock who begets his child Israel (Deut. 32:18) and feeds them with water in the desert (Exod. 17:3–7; Isa. 48:21). Though the people forget him, he remains the true strength of Israel (Deut. 32:30). This theme of God as the Rock in the sense of being a bulwark and fortress runs throughout the Psalter.⁹

As the Rock may be a father and protector of his people, God is also a stone that destroys. In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar in a dream sees a stone that breaks away, untouched by human hands, and which destroys a huge statue made of gold, bronze, iron, and clay. The wind blew away all these elements but the stone remained, growing into a great mountain and filling the earth (Dan. 2:35). Daniel, in answer to the king’s demand, interprets the dream. The stone, he says is the kingdom which God will found, that will shatter and absorb all previous earthly kingdoms, itself never being destroyed (Dan. 2:44).

Thus, the stone spoken of here is essentially eschatological and is most notable for its impending universal influence. The stone in Daniel is a symbol of the future—it will fall upon, destroy, and supplant earthly kingdoms and fill the world with the Kingdom of God. As we will soon study at length, Christ, in using Psalm 118 as a parable to the Pharisees, concludes with this image of the crushing, eschatological stone—most probably derived from Daniel’s prophecy, which was well known to the Jews of his day.

Isaiah, too, associates the “Rock” of God with a judgment—especially on those in Israel who do not believe him. Isaiah 8:14–15 reads:

And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.

Read in the context of Israel’s political misfortunes at the time, the threat of an Assyrian invasion in the eighth century B.C., the text evidently means that, for those who trust in his providence despite the difficult circumstances, God will be a sanctuary. Those who do not trust in him and refuse to see beyond the human or the political, will find God to be a stumbling stone. Those who do not see God in current events, those who are blind to his demands on their lives, will stumble. God who wanted to be a true sanctuary and a firm rock for his people, will instead be for them a cause of ruin and confusion.

We find a similar use of the stone metaphor in Isaiah 28:16:

8 Isa. 8:14–15; Dan. 2:34–35, 44–45.

9 See Pss. 18:3; 27:5, 6; 31:3; 40:1–3; 62:3.

Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: "He who believes will not be in haste."

The rock here can be interpreted on a purely physical level. For instance, Isaiah seems to be referring to the great, solid foundation stones of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 5:17). We can also read this passage in a more spiritual way. The "stone" is the remnant of chosen people whom God founds in Zion. For those who are not founded on this faith in God, Isaiah foretells a "crushing" defeat—"When the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it" (Isa. 28:18).

The consequences for rejecting the rock are analogous, then, to those mentioned in Isaiah 8:14–15. Yet it is worthwhile to note that the rock itself mentioned in Isaiah 28:16 is not God himself, but is *laid by him*. In a more general way, though, both oracles agree: one must have faith in God if he is to stand.

The stone in both of these passages has a double meaning, which complements the meaning of the cornerstone in Psalm 118 in power and depth. The stone for Isaiah is both a source of stumbling (Isa. 8:14–15) and a foundation stone (Isa. 28:16). Isaiah's profound message is similar to Psalm 118's—the need for supernatural vision in the face of history. Those who do not trust in God and who think only humanly in times of crisis shall fall and be broken upon the very God they did not trust.

What is the relation between the cornerstone of Psalm 118 and the stone of Isaiah? In Isaiah, the rock is more "existential," so to speak. It is not so much a question of the vision of faith, but rather an entire life of faith. The stone in Isaiah 8:14–15 is used almost as an anti-symbol against the Jews themselves, whereas the cornerstone in our psalm verse could symbolize the Jews in a positive and triumphant sense. Yet both passages are imbued with the notion of rejection (compare Isa. 30:12). Self-sufficiency and deceit are the real cause of the Jews' blindness, according to Isaiah, making God a rock of stumbling and self-ruin rather than a sanctuary.

The stone as a source of life; the stone as protector of the people; the stone as firmness for the believer; the stone as occasion of ruin. All of these Old Testament images are in some way connected with the basic attitude of the people of Israel toward God, and of God toward them. The stone as "kingdom to come" and "cornerstone of the universe" are said to be the future work of God's power. All these meanings of the messianic stone were in play when New Testament times arrived with the birth of Christ.

The Psalms and the Self-Consciousness of Jesus

As scholars have long noticed, the psalms represent the single most quoted portion of the Old Testament in the New Testament writings.¹⁰ No doubt this reflects the importance of the psalms in the liturgical life of devout Jews. This is not the place to explore the implications of this evidence except to note that the Gospels depict Christ himself quoting from the Psalter on numerous occasions.¹¹

In his final days in Jerusalem, he deploys such quotations to dramatic effect. In his debate with the Pharisees, he applies to himself Psalm 110:1, an enthronement psalm associated with the coronation of Davidic kings. In the process, he leaves his opponents speechless and strongly suggests his own divinity (Matt. 22:21–46).

During his trial, when the High Priest presses him to confess whether or not he is the Christ, Jesus answers that “from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). Here he is quoting from Psalm 110:1 indirectly (“The LORD said to my Lord: sit at my right hand”). Again the allusion serves as a statement of his divine identity. The words of the psalm are to be crystallized in his future glory, which will reveal him as the divine Son and Davidic savior and king anticipated by Israel.

On the cross, in the hour of his greatest desertion and aloneness, he chooses to cry out in a psalm verse:

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have you deserted me?” (Matt. 27:45–46; Ps. 22:1).

Jesus consciously uses the psalms throughout his life, according to the Gospel testimony. He draws them out on many occasions and for many purposes—to clarify, to rebuke and silence, to predict his own glorious future, to express his deepest affliction, to exemplify and add power to his teaching, to refer to himself and the Kingdom of God, and to sing and give praise to God like any other pious Jew (see Matt. 26:30–32).

We also need to note that Psalm 118, along with Psalm 110, has been identified as the most significant in New Testament citations. Some argue that it is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament—quoted at least eleven times, with

¹⁰ A recent study determined that of the Scripture quotations in Mark, 21 percent are from the psalms; 18 percent of the quotations in Matthew are from the psalms; 31 percent in Luke; and 76 percent in John. The number of allusions and other intertextual echoes point to an even greater influence for the psalms. See the discussion in Margaret Daly-Denton, *David in the Fourth Gospel: The Johannine Reception of the Psalms*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 22–57; the statistical overview is at 34.

¹¹ See, for instance, Matt. 5:4 (Ps. 37:11); Matt. 5:33–35 (Ps. 48:3); Matt. 21:15–16 (Ps. 8:2; Wis. 10:20–21).

thirteen more allusions made to it.¹² But more than statistically significant, the psalm is decisive for the developing of christology and, as we will see, ecclesiology. Klyne Snodgrass has argued that the section of the psalm that concerns us in this article, Psalm 118:22–26, is among the three Old Testament texts that “provided the framework for Jesus’ understanding of his ministry.”¹³ I agree with Snodgrass, and I believe our study of the New Testament usage will bear that out.

Psalm 118 in Matthew 21

It is in this larger context that we have to seek the meaning of his use of Psalm 118:22–23 in Matthew 21:42–43. It must be noted that the deployment of the psalm comes at the conclusion of a section of the book, Chapter 21, which is entirely overlaid with messianic themes and Old Testament imagery and pivots on Jesus’ conflict with the religious authorities of Israel.

The entire chapter from the first verse has clear messianic overtones, which spring from the theme of rejection and glorious recognition. By deliberately entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Christ was indicating his messianic identity. Zechariah’s prophecy of the king on the donkey (Zech. 9:9) would have been well known to the Pharisees and was commonly accepted in those days as a sign of the Messiah. His opponents and supporters alike would have known that the man who purposefully attempted to fulfill that prophecy was indirectly proclaiming himself Messiah.¹⁴ Hence the crowd’s knowing enthusiasm and the Pharisees’ bitter envy. To add to the messianic cast of the chapter, the crowds are depicted as honoring him with a title that was widely recognized as messianic (“Son of David”).¹⁵

As in the original setting of Psalm 118, in Matthew 21 the people and their joy play a central role. The entire scene seems to be a repetition of the psalm, with the

12 For a helpful review of all the quotations and allusions, see Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John*, 2. Reviewing the scholarly claims about the importance of the psalm, Brunson comments: “Such claims, if true, would suggest that Ps. 118 should rank among the most important Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament. Among its occurrences in the New Testament, it is linked with the Son of Man in the passion predictions, voiced in Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, quoted in the entrance to Jerusalem narrative, and is key to understanding the parable of the wicked tenants.”

13 According to Snodgrass, the other decisive Old Testament texts for Jesus’ self-understanding are Isa. 61:1–13 and Dan. 7:13–14. See his “The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 29–51, at 40. See also on Ps. 118:222–23, Snodgrass’ *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 27 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983).

14 S. L. Edgar, “New Testament and Rabbinic Messianic Interpretation,” *New Testament Studies* (1958), 47–54.

15 For specific testimonies from the Talmud and Midrash, see Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [Commentary on the New Testament from Talmud and Midrash], 4 vols., 3d ed. (München: Beck, 1951–1956), 842.

celebrants in Jerusalem, as in the psalm, bringing out branches in a festal procession and crying out: "Hosanna! Blessings on he who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 21:9; Ps. 118:26). The people of Jerusalem here sing the psalm as part of their manifest recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, giving exuberant thanksgiving to God. Indeed, on a spiritual, historic, and linguistic level Psalm 118 is fulfilled in Matthew 21—the acclaim of the crowds for their hero, the procession and the branches, the way Christ "cuts down" (Ps. 118:10) his adversaries in a series of very biting encounters (the expulsion of the dealers from the Temple, the withering of the fig tree, the parables of the two sons and the wicked tenants).

The fact that Jesus, at the end of this series of words and deeds, applied Psalm 118 to himself probably did not escape his audience. Hence, we must conclude that Jesus understood the psalm in a messianic sense, in the same way that he understood his symbolic actions in the Temple and his parables. His driving out the merchants and money-changers from the Temple had clear messianic implications, as Jesus makes clear by quoting from the prophets.¹⁶ He heals the blind and the lame, too, in likely another messianic and royal-Davidic act.¹⁷

The scene provokes a confrontation with the religious authorities that becomes the context for his cursing of the fig tree and his series of parables delivered against Israel's leaders. But first Jesus is depicted quoting another psalm. He uses Psalm 8:2, which speaks of babies and infants glorifying God. Again, his use of the psalm is associated with his sense of his own identity. He seems clearly to be saying that the children of Jerusalem, like the children of the psalm, are declaring the majesty of God who is in their midst in his person.

But he also seems to be evoking the immediate context of the psalm, which would have been known by both him and his audience. The very next verse of Psalm 8 speaks of God founding a bulwark to confound his enemies and to put his adversaries to silence. This, of course, is what Jesus will go on to do in the prophetic withering of the fig tree and in the confrontation with the elders over his authority (Matt. 21:23–27).

The fig tree episode that follows (Matt. 21:18–22), in which Christ curses the tree for not bearing fruit, is often interpreted as symbolizing Israel, which was not prepared for the Messiah.¹⁸ And as the drama unfolds throughout Matthew 21, Jesus' words and actions build on a pattern of rejection followed by glory, culminating in the dramatic prediction that the "son" of the vineyard owner will be killed by the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:39). The lesson is an obvious one and is certainly

16 See Matt. 21:12–17; compare Isa. 56:3–8; Jer. 7:4, 8–10.

17 Compare Matt. 21:14; 2 Sam. 5:6, 8. See the discussion in Davies and Allison, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 140.

18 Manuel de Tuya, *Evangelios* [The Gospels], Biblia Comentada 5 (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1964), 462.

not lost on the Pharisees, priests, and scribes: they have refused to recognize the Messiah's inherent authority and power, and their days are now numbered.

Matthew records that Christ told a double parable about the vineyard: the parable of the two sons and the parable of the wicked husbandmen. Both end on the same obvious implication: the kingdom would be lost or taken from the religious authorities and given to others. These "others" in the first parable are the tax collectors and prostitutes, who "are making their way into the Kingdom of God" before the so-called leaders of the people. In the second parable, the "others" are those who will be given the vine to produce its fruit. So there is rejection for some, divinely granted privilege for others. The ones most despised (tax collectors) and most persecuted (the only son of the vineyard owner) would be the true heirs of the Kingdom of God.

In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, just as in the parable of the vineyard laborers, the vineyard itself does not change, although its caretakers do. God is consistent in his promises to the true Israel, which is his vineyard so lovingly planted long before (compare Isa. 5:1–7). But the vineyard tenants can become perverse and can reject the owner and his just claims for payment. Like the barren fig tree, the tenants, the authorities of Israel, give no fruit and end up rejecting and killing the owner's son.

That Jesus identifies himself in this parable with the rejected "son," links this parable to his "parable-like" use of the cornerstone metaphor in the verses that immediately follow. The same pattern is used—rejection of God's servant (or stone) results in punishment. As the wicked tenants are dispatched to a "miserable death," those who reject the "stone" are crushed and destroyed by it. There are many eschatological suggestions here, both of punishment for the Jewish leaders and Christ's final glory, as the rejected stone becomes the keystone.¹⁹

The Pattern of Rejection and Glorification

This is the immediate context in which we must look for the meaning of Christ's use of Psalm 118:22–23. As we have seen, Jesus' quotation of the psalm is the culmination and crowning phrase of the preceding series of teachings and symbolic actions that emphasize the theme of rejection and glorification. Specifically, his use of the psalm is tied to the immediately preceding parable of the tenants, with its deep allegorical overtones. The meaning could not be clearer: a new people would supplant Israel's elders as the shepherds of the Kingdom of God, just as new

19 Joachim Jeremias interprets Christ's use of the cornerstone phrase as intentionally eschatological. The glorious keystone is to crown the heavenly Temple of the future; this Temple is a figure of the saved people of God at the end of time. Apart from being a keystone he will also be a punishment for his enemies, for Christ is also a stone to fall upon and be crushed, as Matt. 21:44 attests. See Jeremias, "Lithos, Lithinos [Stone]," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1985), 4:268–280.

husbandmen would be chosen for the vineyard. The same meaning is intended by his use of Psalm 118 in the verses that follow this parable.²⁰ We see the same basic theme—the ingratitude of Israel and God’s punishment. The son who is killed in the parable is left unnamed, as is the identity of the “stone”; but the context points to Jesus as the referent in both cases.

Throughout this passage, too, we have an odd mixing of metaphors—of the vineyard and the stone. Hence, Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33–41), then follows that parable immediately with the quotation of our psalm (Matt. 21:42). Immediately after quoting the psalm, he returns to the vineyard metaphor about “producing the fruits” of the kingdom (Matt. 21:43). After that the metaphor shifts back again to that of the stone:

And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when
it falls on any one, it will crush him. (Matt. 21:44)

In his use of the psalm, Jesus appears to evoke a proverb in vogue in those days, attributed to a Jewish rabbi of the second century B.C.:

If the rock falls on the dish, poor dish!
If the dish falls on the rock, poor dish!²¹

In other words, if one refuses the rock he will be crushed. Beneath this surface meaning, deeply embedded in the Old Testament, was the entire “theology of the Rock” that we alluded to earlier. Indeed, Jesus appears to be evoking both Isaiah’s prophecy that many shall fall and be broken upon the divine “Rock” (Isa. 8:14–15), and the prophecy of Daniel 2:34–44, which foretold the crushing of God’s opponents by a stone “not cut out by human hand” and the establishment of a “kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” Both prophecies of the stone are thereby connected with the rejected stone of Psalm 118:22–23. And the “cornerstone” of our psalm is likewise associated with the “sanctuary” of Isaiah 8:14 and the “kingdom” of Daniel 2:44.

The reference to Daniel also helps us to see another important dimension of the metaphors of the stone and the vineyard in Matthew 21. The wording of the cornerstone verse, taken exactly from the Septuagint translation by Matthew, is in a “rebuilding” context. As in Psalm 118, a stone which has been discarded is reestablished and remounted. In itself this biblical theme evokes a great number of sentiments—of renewed trust in God, of conversion, of suffering then deliverance. Jesus’ use of this psalm, then, is not random. The words are rich in biblical

20 That Christ was fully aware of the consequences behind Psalm 118 and that he had actually lived them and foretold them is particularly noted by Johannes Betz in his article, “Christus-Petra-Petrus, [Christ, Rock, Peter]” in *Kirche und Überlieferung* [Church and Tradition], Johannes Betz and Heinrich Fries (Freiburg: Herder, 1960).

21 Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 1:877.

resonance, and the basic principles of rejection followed by glorification are simply extended and completed in the person of Jesus and in his life—although they are also mysteriously projected to an unknown future intervention of God in favor of his Son.

The builders of the people of God, Israel's leaders, like the tenants in his parable, had rejected their foundation and future, Israel's cornerstone and heir. For this reason they will be cut off—either killed as were the tenants in the vineyard parable, or crushed with the rock as in Jesus' stone metaphor. As the parable and the psalm imply the identity of Jesus as "son" and "stone," so both the parable and the psalm herald the rise of a new people.

Hence, we detect a close connection in both his parable and his quotation of the psalm between the Kingdom of God and the people God has chosen. Matthew 21:43 speaks of a new people (*ethnos*) to whom the Kingdom of God is given. This *ethnos* is the same as the *ethnos hagian* ("holy nation") of 1 Peter 2:9. In Matthew, as in 1 Peter, the people of the covenant are involved. Indeed the text of the epistle (which we shall study at length below) shows a similar polemic against unbelieving Judaism, against which judgment is proclaimed in an allusion to Isaiah 8:14 (compare 1 Pet. 2:7).

The central notion in the epistle text is the very idea that Matthew seems to draw from our parable: in the very act of rejection by the unbelievers, God has laid the cornerstone of his house, his Temple—the new chosen race, the royal priesthood, the *ethnos hagian*, the people of his new covenant.

A corollary of this interpretation is that the people to whom the vineyard is now entrusted will share in the glory of their chief cornerstone. Just as Christ himself was rejected then glorified, so will his people be persecuted and then glorified and raised in Christ, their chief cornerstone and keystone. It is a religious phenomenon deeply embedded in Old Testament history—how Israel herself was despised but then exalted. The fact that Christ's rejection and glorification are here expressed in material terms (stone and builders) does not take away from the fact that a true human community is at stake.

The Cornerstone and the Rock: Beginnings of the Church

The intimate identification of Jesus with this new *ethnos* is represented by his relationship with the man he designates as the "rock" upon whom he will build his Church. This is not the place to rehearse the long literature on the place of Peter in the New Testament. What I want to suggest here is that in renaming Simon as *Petros*, or "rock," Jesus established a set of connections that would influence the New Testament's understanding of the "rejected stone" psalm and consequently the Church's own self-understanding.

The expression "to build upon a rock" is only found in two places in the Gospels—both on the lips of Christ himself. One, of course, is his famous com-

missioning of St. Peter: "upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18). The second passage is found at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it. (Matt. 7:24–27)

The passage is quite clear. Only the man who listens and acts on Christ's word will be building on a rock—only his construction will last. The implication here is that it is not sufficient to simply listen to Christ's word, nor simply to cry out "Lord, Lord," if one truly wants to be built up into Christ and to build in Christ. This is one aspect of Christ's promise to Peter that should be kept in mind. Christ builds in Peter; Peter himself does not build.

Speaking of Christ's foundation of his Church, Michael Schmaus notes that it is difficult to pinpoint any one solemn act by which the Church was established. In fact, suggestively, he sees that "the Church grew throughout Jesus' life according to his creative will. Everything he did was like a stone laid in the house of God, which is the Church, and as such is willed and desired by him."²²

What then is the true relation between Christ and Peter as the Bible portrays it? The Greek grammar suggests something of the answer. Note that the expression in Matthew 16:18 "upon this rock" (*epi tautē tē petra oikodomēso*) is in the dative, the relative sense. Peter as a rock is intrinsically dependent on the real Rock, the cornerstone. The man who listens to Christ's words and lives them builds his life on a rock that is ontologically firm for itself (*epi tēn petran*; Matt. 7:24). Peter, despite the great authority Christ promises him, will always be dependent on Christ's own ontological firmness. Thus Christ can build both on Peter's greatness or his littleness, but ultimately the Church depends on Christ's own greatness. In a certain sense, Christ's power is most clearly seen when he builds an invincible Church upon a "little rock"—*petros*.²³

22 Michael Schmaus, *Katolische Dogmatik*, 5 vols. (München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1960–1963), 4:167. My translation. English: *Dogma*, 6 vols. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968–1977).

23 Heinrich Stephan, Theobaldus Fix, Karl Benedict Hase, Ludwig Dindorf, Wilhelm Dindorf, and G. R. Lud. de Sinner, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, vol. 7 (Graz: Akademische, 1954), 1017, 1020.

Living Stones and the New Temple

It is interesting, then, that it is in a New Testament writing attributed to St. Peter that we find the most extended reflection upon the reality of Christ as the cornerstone of the Church. Peter alone of all New Testament authors shows the greatest interest in developing and charismatically applying the cornerstone image.²⁴

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner," and "A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall"; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.
(1 Pet. 2:4–10)

²⁴ Whatever be the relation between 1 Pet. 2:4–7 (see Mark 12:10 and parallels) and Rom. 9:33, the apostle Peter would have had special interests in the stone-motif because of his own new name "Cephas-Peter-Rock" and because of Jesus' statement to him, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:16). Luke corroborates Peter's interest in this theme by recording that Peter used the same saying about Jesus as the rejected cornerstone (or capstone) in one of his early sermons (Acts 4:11). The uniqueness of 1 Pet.'s exegesis for the Christian community is emphasized by Gundry: "The Petrine concept of Christians as living stones in relation to Christ, the living stone *par excellence*, has no parallel in the other stone-passages and may well derive from Peter's own experience, namely, his being named *Petros* because of his disciple relationship to Christ." Indeed, throughout 1 Pet. we find key passages directly linked with sayings of the Lord and events in Peter's own life in union with Christ. Thus, the peculiar experience and psychology of Peter can be traced in the epistle. See Gundry, "Verba Christi' in 1 Peter: Their Implications concerning the Authorship of 1 Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966–1967): 336–350, at 346. C. F. D. Moule has also argued that the stone tradition in 1 Pet. is rooted in Peter's naming by Christ as *Petros* and his designation as *petra* (rock). See "Some Reflection on the 'Stone' Testimonia in Relation to the Name Peter," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955–1956): 56–58.

The development of the stone metaphor in 1 Peter 2:4–10 is the most ample treatment of Christ as “the Rock” and the Church as the new Temple of God in all of the New Testament. In turn, we see in this passage how this metaphor became important for the self-understanding of the early Church, a self-understanding that, as we said at the outset, continues to be reflected in the Church’s official teaching. In developing this metaphor, Peter unites in one incisive vision Psalm 118:22–23 and the Isaianic tradition concerning God as the stone, applying them both to Jesus and his teaching. In addition, he inherently connects the identity of the new people of God as a new Israel through the use of Jesus’ cornerstone imagery and the image of the Church as a new Temple of God built upon that cornerstone.

Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:4–10 is the “living stone” (*lithon zōnta*). The people built upon him are “living stones” (*lithoi zōntes*). To apply the term “living” to an inert object like a stone may seem a bit strange at first. But one need only recall the Bible’s own use of the term “rock” in Deuteronomy 32, where the rock is said to “engender his people” (Deut. 32:18).

In the same sense, the verb that Peter uses, *oikodomeisthe* (“built into”), can mean the “building” of a person—as God was said to have “built” Eve out of the bone of Adam.²⁵ This living construction is an action proper to God, and seems to have been implied in Christ’s saying to Peter, “upon this rock I will build my Church.”²⁶ In this case, the living stones are being built-up on the foundation of the living stone, Christ, into a new Temple, a “spiritual house” (*oikos pneumatikos*). The building of his Church, which is something living and divine, is a marvel which God has done and which Peter openly announces in this passage.

Christ, the living stone, is said to be chosen by God (*eklekton*) but rejected by men (*hypo anthrōpōn men apodedokimasmenon*). The Greek term *eklekton* will also be applied to the new people of God, who are a “chosen race” (*genos eklekton*; 1 Pet. 2:9). The living stone, too, is said to be “rejected,” an obvious allusion to Christ’s application of Psalm 118:22–23 to himself. However, here the antagonists—the rejecters of the stone—are not the Jewish elders as they are in Jesus’ initial reading of the psalm and in the preaching of Peter reflected in Acts 4:11. Instead, they are “men,” or humanity in general (*anthrōpōn*). Peter may here have altered the phrase to adapt Christ’s image and message to his flock, since they may have been suffering persecution at the time of Peter’s writing (compare 1 Pet. 3:13–17). Peter’s message, then, would be that Christ, the living stone, was also rejected and persecuted by men just as the Christians were suffering for the sake of his name. The living and suffering quality of the rejected stone, then, has been transferred to the people.

25 Compare the Septuagint translation of Gen. 2:22.

26 God’s building through one man can be especially appreciated in Isa. 51:1–2, where Abraham is called a rock and his people proceed through God’s guidance: “Listen to me, you who pursue integrity, who seek the LORD. Consider the rock you were hewn from, the quarry from which you were cut. Consider Abraham your father and Sarah who gave you birth. For he was alone when I called him, but I blessed and increased him.”

The living stones are being built into a spiritual house (*oikos pneumatikos*). This imagery is familial in the sense of a “household” of God. But it is also evocative of the Temple. This new Temple reading is reinforced by the designation of the new people of God as a holy priesthood (*eis hierateuma hagion*) responsible for offering spiritual sacrifices (*anenegkai pneumatikas thysias*) pleasing to God through Christ.

The language here is all priestly and sacrificial—emphasizing the identity of the new people as being a new Temple and a new priesthood, offering a new kind of sacrifice, “spiritual sacrifices.” Again, the identity of this new people is tied intimately to the identity of Christ. As the new Temple is joined to the cornerstone of Christ, the new priesthood can only offer sacrifices “through Christ,” that is, in union with the priesthood of Christ.

After proclaiming the marvelous identity of this new people of God, Peter “proves” this identity through a creative appeal to the Old Testament, deploying a singularly inspired combination of Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 8:14, and Psalm 118:22–23—all of which are united in the person of Jesus or his teaching. As an explanation of the holy priesthood of the faithful, Peter adduces the foundation stone phrase of Isaiah 28:16. The implication is that Christians can offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, because they are grounded on the foundation stone of Zion, Jesus Christ. Of course, the explicit reference to Zion associates Christ again with the Temple.²⁷

In Peter’s usage, the cornerstone (*lithon akrogōniaion*) is seen here in a double connotation we discussed in considering the original texts in Isaiah. It is both a foundation stone and stumbling stone at the same time. Archeologically it has been shown that the cornerstones of old were huge rocks which served to unite two walls of a building or temple, and which jutted out and often caused people to trip.²⁸ Peter in the same way sees Christ as the cornerstone of the New Temple, which served to unite the two walls of the new people of God—the Jew and Gentile—and to support the entire structure of the Church. But in addition, Christ is the stone that makes men stumble—those men, that is, who do not believe him. This double effect of the one and only stone is developed metaphorically by Peter in the subsequent verses (1 Pet. 2:7–9).

In interpreting Christ as both cornerstone and stumbling block, Peter follows Isaiah and Jesus in linking Psalm 118 with Isaiah 8:13–14. The implication, again, is that one and the same stone will have two different effects: it will be a cause of joy and honor for some (Ps. 118:23), and a cause of ruin and defeat for others (Dan. 2:34 and Isa. 8:14).

27 Compare Isa. 30:20: “Go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.” For the Zion traditions, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 424–425.

28 *Biblia Comentada V* (Evangelios) Manuel de Tuya, O.P., 473. Compare *Revue Biblique* (1920), 488.

After recalling the unfortunate reality of the stumbling of some, he refers immediately to the joy and privilege of the new chosen people. Peter identifies the Church as the new Israel, or rather, as the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to Israel at Mount Sinai (1 Pet. 2:9–10). Peter here draws on the covenantal formulation of Exodus 19:3–8 and applies to the living stones, the new people of God, all the titles that God once gave the Israelites in establishing them as his chosen people. The Church is to be a “royal priesthood (*basileion hierateuma*), a holy nation (*ethnos hagion*), and a people for God’s own possession” (*laos eis peripoiēsin*).

The people themselves are connected to their cornerstone by the adjective “chosen” (*eklekton*). They are a chosen people (*genos eklekton*) just like their Savior was chosen by God (*lithos ... eklekton para de Theō*). The new people of God does not “replace” the old. Instead, the Church inherits the prerogatives and responsibilities given to Israel in its original election by God and the covenant made following the Exodus. In this, the Church fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah for a “new Exodus,” a restoration from exile and the reestablishment of a chosen people:

Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert. ...
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
that they might declare my praise. (Isa. 43:19–21)

This prophecy is the other scriptural foundation underlying 1 Peter 4:9. The Church is the new people that God has formed for himself. And this “new thing,” this new Exodus that Isaiah alludes to, is evoked most fully in the faith in Jesus, and God’s marvelous action on behalf of his people.

The Church, then, is tantamount to a new creation. Peter makes this clear when again he applies messianic texts to the Church. The living stones, the holy nation, the chosen race, and royal priesthood, is a new people created out of a “no people.”

Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once
you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.
(1 Pet. 2:10; compare Hosea 1:9–10; 2:23–24)

Again we see the pattern of rejection and glorification. A people who were once “no people,” by the mercy of God have been made “God’s people.” And again the Church fulfills the prophecy of old:

I will say to No-people-of-mine, “You are my People”;
and he will answer “You are my God.” (Hos. 2:24)

Some Implications for Ecclesiology

Thus we see that in 1 Peter, the self-designation of Christ as the cornerstone in Psalm 118 serves to ground a deep reading of the reality of the Church in light of the Old Testament. And we find Peter's exegesis consistent with the stone and cornerstone imagery used throughout the New Testament writings.

For the New Testament writers, the cornerstone prophecy, as we have analyzed it in the Old Testament, is fulfilled and brought to bear in the person and works of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the reality of rejection is applied to the leaders of the chosen people (Matt. 21:42–43), but is also extended to all men and women (1 Pet. 2:4).

The term *apodokimazein* ("rejected") can refer both to the rejection of Christ by Israel's priests (Luke 9:22), or by the people who are included in the more general "this generation" (Luke 17:25). The root word itself, *dokimē*, refers to a concrete historic test with salvific consequences (Rom. 12:12; Phil. 1:10). In this case, the test is Christ himself. Christ, the cornerstone, is seen as the source of stumbling and confusion for those in Israel who do not believe (Rom. 9:33). The reason for rejecting Christ remains the same as in the Old Testament—pride and self-sufficiency.

In all the New Testament passages there is a notable deepening with respect to the interconnection between God the rejected One and the people he founds and supports. Christ is not only a cornerstone in the sense of a foundation; he is also a keystone or capstone in the sense of being his people's chief glory. St. Peter describes this mysterious bond when he speaks of Christians as living stones built on the living rock, which is Christ (1 Pet. 2:5). The Christians, who were once a non-people, have become the people of mercy.

St. Paul sees both Jew and Gentile as united upon one foundation, which is Christ. He alludes to this union as a living structure which "grows" into a holy Temple (Eph. 2:19–22), and which is rooted in the mystery of God's eternal love for man (Eph. 2:4–5). The Church, then, is a spiritual edifice built upon the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of the apostles. To "build upon" the cornerstone of Christ, believers must possess doctrinal fidelity and personal humility (compare Col. 2:7; 1 Cor. 3:9–11). To build-up or "edify" one another as Christians, mutual charity is necessary (1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Thess. 6:11).

Christ constitutes a life-giving stone as well as a testing stone (1 Cor. 10:4), thus uniting in his person those aspects of divine power which had been revealed in the Old Testament—God as the rock that begets his child (Deut. 32:18), the Rock that gives water to a thirsty people (Exod. 17:3–7).

St. John, in the Apocalypse, though he does not quote Psalm 118 directly, represents the final triumphant state of Christ the rejected stone. The image of Christ as the living stone and the Church as the new Temple of living stones culminates in the vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven in glory. After the enemies of God and his people are fully conquered and destroyed, the glorious kingdom of the Lamb and his Father will be established. The heavenly city of

Jerusalem is built upon twelve foundation stones (Rev. 21:14). It is the final victory of Christ and his people. As both had been rejected and persecuted, now both are reinstated in love and glory. Their kingdom will fill the world in the eschatological sense of the stone in Daniel 2:34 and the cosmological sense of Job 38:6.

None of these passages, of course, are isolated in themselves. They all point to and depend upon the central reality of Christ and his people, both of whom are rejected yet reigning. Indeed, there are many references to Christ's rejection by his own people (Matt. 21:42–44; 1 Pet. 2:8). Instead of being a rock of life and sureness, he has become a stumbling stone (Isa. 8:14).

There is, then, an obvious ontological and ecclesiological import behind Psalm 118:22–23—one of the many Old Testament passages that are uplifted and transformed in the reality of the Word incarnate. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" thus entails a complete New Testament reality. It is the revelation about Christ and his people which is extended into time, and affords an interesting characteristic about the nature of the Church—its participation in the rejection and glory of her founder. Nevertheless, at the same time, the second part of the psalm passage—"This is God's work and it is wonderful to see"—speaks of the need of faith to fully grasp the meaning of that relationship. I have tried in this article to show how a rejection-glory pattern lies behind the events narrated in Matthew 21 and its parallels. There is a continuous tension between those who reject Christ and those who accept him.

With regard to the ecclesiological significance of the Scripture verses under study, we may conclude that the image of Christ the Rock has many facets—all of which point to key relations between Christ and his people, between his people and the world. Christ himself is a foundation stone for those who believe in him, while he is a stumbling stone for unbelievers. In his person and his teaching he is rejected not only by persecutors and unbelievers, but also by the proud or self-sufficient within the chosen community. In the end, however, he is glorified and his true people rejoice with him, since he is the cornerstone and keystone of their existence.

Upon Christ, the stone rejected yet reigning as the cornerstone, a source of stumbling yet the source of security, his Church is aligned and grows in holiness. His people are the living stones attached to him and bound in love and mutual edification. To remain firmly founded and organically attached upon this foundation, one must be humble and remain doctrinally faithful.

The Church's members, hence, are intrinsically united to Christ, and share in their Master's rejection and glorification. At the end of time, Christ and his people will finally triumph over evil—their enemies will be definitively crushed and broken upon him—and Christ will become the cornerstone and keystone of the universe, in which God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).