



# A Chosen People

November 8, 2009

***BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:***

***1 PETER 2:1-17***

***PRINTED TEXT:***

***1 PETER 2:1-10***

*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

*—1 Peter 2:9*

## Opening Song

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### Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

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### Opening Prayer

*1 PETER 2:1-10 (NIV)*

**2**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. <sup>2</sup>Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. <sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." <sup>7</sup>Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, <sup>8</sup>and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**INTRODUCTION****A. BUILDING PROJECTS**

“Measure twice, cut once.” “Fresh paint covers a multitude of mistakes.” “A job worth doing is worth doing right.” These and many other axioms form the folk wisdom of remodelers and their construction projects. One engaged in such work soon learns, however, that slogans must be backed up by the right tools, quality materials, a good plan, and practiced skills.

Unfortunately, many church buildings look as if they have been thrown together over the years by amateurs with little advance planning. To achieve quality results in building projects requires the patience, diligence, and planning abilities of a skilled builder. The true craftsman will not use cull lumber or sloppy workers. The master will not proceed with half-baked plans. The true artisan will not hurry the project to conclusion by cutting corners or compromising the design.

The New Testament sometimes pictures the church as a spiritual “house,” an edifice constructed by God for his glory. Paul uses this construction metaphor to picture the church as a temple built on the foundation of the apostles with Jesus as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20, 21; compare 1 Corinthians 3:9–11).

God is the master craftsman with the perfect plan. We are his building material, and he has refined us and sanctified us through his Spirit to be just as he desires. We are built by God to be his chosen household, his holy habitation, or dwelling (Ephesians 2:22).

**B. LESSON BACKGROUND**

In the ancient world, building construction was much more difficult than it is today. There were no big-box construction supply stores in Jerusalem or Rome. There was no pre-cut lumber or pre-hung doors.

Abandoned structures provided the most readily available construction material, particularly in terms of their stone blocks. If one was building a structure out of stone, it was much easier to take a block from an older building, clean and dress it a bit, and use it immediately. The burdensome alternative was to find a nearby source of suitable stone, set up a quarry operation, and transport blocks to the construction site.

There were cheaper alternatives to stone buildings, of course. Tents could be lavish and spacious, but these lacked a sense of permanence and grandeur. Bricks could be made on site if the right type of soil was present, but bricks might be limited in size and function. Wood was adaptable for many purposes, of course. But most of the forested areas surrounding cities had long been harvested. So large amounts of timber usually had to be imported from considerable distances (compare 1 Kings 5). Wood was susceptible to rot, and therefore it lacked the durability of stone.

All things considered, then, there was no substitute for stone when erecting grand public buildings such as temples. An example that Peter was familiar with was the Jerusalem temple as reconstructed by Herod the Great. Herod’s builders reconstructed the foundation of the temple mount using massive “ashlars” or foundation stones. The largest of these that survives has dimensions of 12' x 12' x 48' and weighs an estimated 400 tons. Even the most ambitious of the temple destroyers since Herod has been unable to budge or crack this monolith.

While Peter does not mention the Jerusalem temple specifically in today’s lesson text, he does seem to have it in mind. We know that he was a frequent visitor to the temple courts when in the holy city (see Acts 3:1; 5:42). If he were in Rome at the time he penned 1 Peter, he also would have witnessed the massive stone structures of that imperial city. These included the colossal structures of the Temple of Jupiter and the original Pantheon of Agrippa.

We should remember the general context and purpose of Peter's letters: advice on how to live as Christians in the midst of hostile nonbelievers. Peter draws on his deep knowledge of the Old Testament and his rich Jewish heritage to present his case for the church as a holy, exemplary people who are dedicated to the service of God.

## ***I. CHOOSING A SPIRITUAL DIET (1 PETER 2:1–3)***

### ***A. ELIMINATE TOXIC FOOD (v. 1)***

***1. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.***

Peter begins his advice on spiritual diet with a list of five attitudes and actions that should be avoided by believers. They are toxic and will poison the soul. He divides the five into three groupings.

First, he exhorts his readers to eliminate *all malice*. This has the sense of evil actions in general. Such actions can be motivated by greed, spite, jealousy, or other moral failings. But the result is an action that intends to harm another person. The word *malice* can have the connotation of “ugly,” the opposite of what is beautiful or lovely (see Philippians 4:8).

The second grouping consists of *deceit*, *hypocrisy*, and *envy*. These are attitudes or personality traits. *Deceit* is an orientation of general dishonesty. It describes persons who may be counted on to lie if it benefits them in some way. *Hypocrisy* describes deep insincerity. The hypocritical person will play whatever role is most beneficial to him or her on a personal level. Today, we would describe this as “phoniness.” The third attitude in this grouping is *envy*. This bitter, restless spirit always begrudges the success or nice possessions of others. Envy is the opposite of gratitude, of contentment with what God has given to you (see 1 Timothy 6:8).

The last of the three groupings consists of the fifth spiritual poison of *slander of every kind*. This verbal back-stabbing behavior is

the manifestation of the previous three: a deceitful person who feigns innocence and friendship yet harbors deep resentment and envy. Such persons work behind the scenes to damage the reputation of those whom they dislike.

### ***B. THRIVE ON HEALTHY FOOD (VV. 2, 3)***

***2, 3. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.***

Peter has already reminded us of the eternal Word of God as that which results in our new birth as believers. He pictures it as spiritual seed planted in our souls (1 Peter 1:23–25, last week's lesson). Now he expands this to teach us that the Word (*spiritual milk*) is also a source for ongoing growth.

Just as the *newborn* baby denied nourishment will die, so will the Christian who neglects God's Word. For Peter, this is primarily the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament. But Peter also realizes that the New Testament Scriptures are coming into existence in his day (2 Peter 3:16). Even in his old age, Peter loved Scripture. He testifies that he, the great apostle, continued to grow spiritually by absorbing more truths from God's Word. He acknowledges this by thanking the source of the Word, our *Lord who is good*.

People are more cautious these days about what ingredients are included in the foods they eat. Some avoid trans-fats, preservatives, and various additives. But how careful are we about our spiritual diet? Do we shun the unhealthy and feast on the healthy in this realm?

## **II. CHOOSING A BUILDING MATERIAL (1 PETER 2:4–8)**

### **A. BLOCKS FOR THE WALLS (VV. 4, 5)**

**4. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—**

In the verses that follow, Peter displays the value of Scripture by weaving together several themes from the Old Testament. In so doing, he intends to encourage his beleaguered readers. He begins this section by drawing on Psalm 118:22. This passage is applied by Jesus to his own person in Matthew 21:42. Peter himself used it in his earliest preaching (Acts 4:11).

God's building project is a spiritual house made up of people. It started with the first *chosen* and *living stone*, namely Jesus. But he was *rejected* by his human evaluators. They had no insight into the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, was the most *precious* of all human beings. This lack of recognition led to Jesus' death (see 1 Corinthians 2:8). This does not negate the truth that Jesus is indeed the cornerstone for the church (see Ephesians 2:20).

**5.... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

One stone does not make a building no matter how immense it may be. God's *spiritual house* requires other *living stones*. These are the believers—us.

Peter also now reveals the nature of this spiritual house. It is a temple, a place of worship. It is where priests offer *sacrifices* to God. Yet it is a *spiritual* temple, and the sacrifices are spiritual in nature. Too often, we view the church as a place where our needs are met. Peter gives us the picture of an organization devoted to service, to self-denial, to commitment because we are a *holy priesthood*.

Peter is not saying that the priestly class of God's people has been eliminated. He is

saying, rather, that it has been expanded. It now includes all believers. It is not that I don't need a priest because I am now a priest. It is, rather, that any believer can minister to me, and I can minister to any fellow believer. I can perform intercession, that most important of priestly functions, by praying for another believer at any time or place. There is no longer a need for designated intermediaries as was the case with the Old Testament levitical priesthood because we can all assume this function.

### **B. CUSTOM CORNERSTONE (V. 6)**

**6. For in Scripture it says:**

***“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.”***

Peter returns to the Old Testament to reinforce the divine plan for Christ to be the *cornerstone* of the church. By using a free quotation of Isaiah 28:16, Peter emphasizes that Jesus is the essential *stone* of the building, that Jesus is the *chosen* stone, and that Jesus is the *precious* stone, God's very Son. This description is followed by a promise: faith in God's essential, chosen, and precious Messiah will be rewarded.

### **C. WORK-SITE HAZARDS (VV. 7, 8)**

**7. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,**

***“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone,”***

Not every building *stone* delivered to a construction site can be used by the stonemasons. One might have a small crack that a mason knows will grow and become a disaster in later years. Another might have an unsightly blemish that will detract from the beauty of the finished building. This kind of evaluation process is natural. Similarly, when Jesus confronts us with his claims, it is natural for us to evaluate the truthfulness of those claims. We dare not reach the wrong conclusion as the Jewish leaders did! They were *the builders* who

rejected Jesus. Peter wants believers to find Jesus as *precious* as the Father does.

Peter equates unbelief with disobedience. In this regard, he likely has the unbelieving Jewish nation in mind. To equate faith with obedience does not imply salvation through works, but draws on the fact that both believing and obeying require a surrender of the will. Israel has not surrendered; it has rejected. The marvelous cornerstone of God results in stumbling (next verse).

**8.... and,**

**“A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”**

***They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.***

The Greek word translated *makes them fall* is the source of our English word *scandal*. Paul uses the same Greek word to describe the Jewish reaction to his preaching of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:23. The Jewish nation of Paul and Peter’s day is scandalized to think that its Messiah had to be executed as a common criminal on a Roman cross.

Peter is resigned to this state of Jewish unbelief. He understands that God in his foreknowledge is aware that the enemies of the cross will reject the gospel, thus *they were destined for* this. We can be sure, however, that Peter’s heart longs for the salvation of his nation, as does Paul’s (Romans 9:1–3).

### **III. CHOOSING A HOLY NATION (1 PETER 2:9, 10)**

#### **A. SELECTED FOR ROYALTY (V. 9)**

***9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

Peter continues to draw parallels between the nation of Israel and the church as he moves to the language of statehood. He does

this to illustrate the nature of the church as the new people of God.

Peter lists four ways in which the church of Jesus is God’s new nation. First, the church is a *chosen people*. Christ’s church has not been granted its status because of its accomplishments, but because God selected it (compare his selection of Israel, Deuteronomy 7:6).

Second, for Peter the church is a *royal priesthood*. Those of royal lineage were separate from the priests in ancient Israel. In the church, believers are royalty because of their relationship to King Jesus. We are also priests in that we minister to one another.

Third, the church exists as a *holy nation*. The two concepts of *holiness* and *nationhood* draw on promises given to Israel at Mount Sinai immediately before the giving of the Ten Commandments. There God told the people that he intended them to be “a kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). They were to be unlike any other people on the earth in their dedication and service to God and in God’s favor to them.

Fourth, the church is seen as a *people belonging to God*. They are his unique possession. God does not share the church with any other god. He is a jealous God (see Exodus 34:14).

Why was this new people of God chosen? for what purpose? Peter portrays this in dramatic terms, describing God’s act of choosing his new people as bringing them from spiritual *darkness* into the *wonderful light* of God’s truth. The ultimate purpose, the church’s “reason for being,” is to *declare* his *praises*. The church does not exist for its own pleasure, but to glorify God in all it does.

#### **B. ELECTED FOR MERCY (V. 10)**

***10. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.***

Peter ends this section by alluding to the story of the prophet Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer. Hosea's second child was named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "no mercy" (Hosea 1:6). Hosea's third child was named Lo-Ammi, which means "not my

people" (Hosea 1:9). This was in stark contrast with God's promise to bestow mercy and claim "my people" (Hosea 2:23). For Peter, the extension to non-Jews of the possibility of joining *the people of God* is a mighty act of mercy.

## **CONCLUSION**

How would you react if you learned that the Queen of England were coming to visit your home? Would you clean, paint, and prepare carefully? Or would you let the trash accumulate until the house smelled like a landfill? Even if we are not British, most of us would feel honored to have a visit from royalty, and we would want to be seen at our best.

Within the church, there is (or should be) a real sense that all are royals. Do we act like royalty in the best sense of the word? Do we treat fellow Christians as if they are princes and princesses? Most of all, do we honor King Jesus in all we do? Are we his obedient servants?

One of the things that distinguished the Jews from other nations in the ancient world was their awareness of being a chosen people, a holy nation set apart by God for his purposes. This role of being the holy people of God was continued in the church by its early leaders—leaders such as Peter. May we honor this role in the year 2010 and beyond as we work toward the unity of believers as a holy, royal nation for Jesus.

## **MILK**

Milk is an essential ingredient of life, particularly for newborns. For virtually all mammals, milk is produced for the newborn by the mother. In fact milk production is tied directly to the birth of the infant; without pregnancy and birth, there is no milk production.

As a city-bred boy, I did not initially understand this. It wasn't until I was in graduate school that I realized the connection. I thought cows produced milk as automatically as sheep produce wool, not realizing the gestation of a baby is required to initiate milk production.

Those who promote the consumption of milk point out that it provides essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Chief among these is Vitamin D and calcium, but milk (and other dairy products) also provide healthy amounts of protein. Evidence exists that milk also provides some anticarcinogens. A key benefit for nursing infants is that mother's milk provides antibodies to get the baby off to a healthy start. These have both antibacterial and antiviral properties. In fact, mother's milk seems to have exactly the right amount of protein, calories, and antibodies to keep a baby healthy.

Peter and others of the first century certainly were not aware of all these scientific facts. Even so, Peter presumed the healthy practice of babies being fed milk. Peter knew what he was talking about. Just as a physical milk is crucial to the health and vitality of the baby, so is spiritual milk essential to the health and vitality of the infant Christian. The Bible tells us that eventually we are to move from milk to the meat of the Word of God (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:11–14). But milk comes first.

*OF CLOUDS AND LININGS*

There's an old saying that "every cloud has a silver lining"; but sometimes a silver lining has a cloud. There are advantages and disadvantages to almost every situation, depending on what one is looking for. Whether it's a *cloud with a silver lining* or a *silver lining with a cloud* depends on one's perspective.

To a farmer, a smooth, nicely plowed field is the silver lining that can be obtained only after the cloud of rocks is removed. I read recently of one man's reminiscences along these lines. As a 14-year-old, he and his dad would drive a tractor with a large scoop bucket across the fields. They would pick up various rocks, putting them in the scoop. When the scoop was full, they would dump the rocks in a corner of the field. The whole process was necessary because a rock the size of a softball could cause serious damage to a very expensive combine. Needless to say, the rocks were a great nuisance.

Yet what may be a cloud sometimes can turn into a silver lining. In the British Isles, farmers would be dismayed at the prospect of having to remove large stones that had worked up to the surface over the centuries. This meant having to engage in the backbreaking work of carrying those stones to the edge of the field. But this cloud of rocks then became a silver lining of useful stone fences that separated the fields. Even today many farms there are bordered by these fences.

Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. But to the disobedient, he is a rock of offense. Sometimes a person must stumble over this rock of offense to realize how much of a cornerstone Jesus can and should be.

**LET'S TALK IT OVER**

**1. Which of the unhealthy, toxic attitudes and actions Peter mentions gives Christians the most trouble? How do we lay these aside?**

**2. In addition to Jesus himself, what are some things that people reject that God considers precious? How can we make sure we continue to have God's point of view on these things?**

**3. What does it mean for you to be a "stone" in God's house?**

**4. In what areas of life have you experienced the preciousness of Christ? How do you share this fact with others?**

**5. As God's chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, and peculiar people, how can we show forth His praises?**

**LET'S TALK IT OVER****1. Which of the unhealthy, toxic attitudes and actions Peter mentions gives Christians the most trouble? How do we lay these aside?**

Toxic actions spring from toxic attitudes. Such attitudes are part of the old man of sin (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). Getting rid of these attitudes demands making changes in the way we think and what we allow to dominate our thinking.

Hurtful and harmful attitudes against others come from pride and selfishness. Although this is not a problem Jesus had, He provided an example of overcoming this attitude by demonstrating as a servant what it means to put others first. Paul describes this attitude of Jesus in Philippians 2:6–11. Practicing sincere love by honoring others above self and caring for the needs of others helps eliminate toxic attitudes.

**2. In addition to Jesus himself, what are some things that people reject that God considers precious? How can we make sure we continue to have God's point of view on these things?**

The basic themes of Scripture come to mind. Consider the glorious seven “ones” of Ephesians 4:4–6. Consider also the grand treatment of faith, hope, and love in 1 Corinthians 13. Consider further the majestic theme of grace in Romans.

God's method of operation differs from that of humanity. People glorify the wise and mighty; God chooses those whom the world sees as foolish and weak (see 1 Corinthians 1:26–29). In the church we can glory in buildings and budgets to the neglect of the poor in our evangelism. After all, we may reason, the poor cannot help the church meet its budget. However, God's economy is totally different. He expects us to recognize that fact and fall into line with His plan.

**3. What does it mean for you to be a “stone” in God's house?**

One of the common descriptions used for the church is that it is the body of Christ. Just as each part of the body is important and useful, so each stone in the spiritual house is vital.

Stones in buildings are of different sizes and shapes, but a master builder places them together in just the right way to make a useful structure. In the same way, Jesus Christ takes each individual Christian and places him or her in His church in just the right way. But we must let Him do so! Fervent prayer and godly counsel from others will help keep us from forcing ourselves into the structure in a way that Jesus doesn't want. Every spiritual stone is important in building the Lord's house, His church.

**4. In what areas of life have you experienced the preciousness of Christ? How do you share this fact with others?**

Christ is so precious that people are willing to give up wealth, power, and prestige just to dwell in His presence. Matthew 13:44–46 relates how precious and valuable He is to those who truly know Him. Some of the most precious words in the world are “I love you.” The precious Christ shouts these words from the cross and whispers them at the bedside of the sick.

The knowledge and presence of Christ has brought comfort and peace in the midst of trials and disappointments. Christians have felt the preciousness of Christ through His body on earth, the church. As members of the church support, encourage, and provide for one another, Christ's nearness is felt.

The greatest way in which we experience the precious love of Christ is in salvation. John 3:16 echoes this precious love that all believers have experienced.

**5. As God's chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, and peculiar people, how can we show forth His praises?**

We speak of singing songs of praise or having a praise service as if praise is to be limited to singing or to special times. This is a mistake. Praise to God should be a natural and continual part of life in Christ.

***PRAYER***

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