

Luke 20:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?

Analysis

And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?

Jesus looks directly at them (ἐμβλέψας, emblepsas, gazing intently) and quotes Psalm 118:22. The phrase "What is this then that is written" (Τί οὖν ἔστιν τὸ γεγραμμένον τοῦτο, ti oun estin to gegrinnenon touto) appeals to Scripture's authority—they cannot dismiss the written word. The "stone" (λίθος, lithos) represents the Messiah; the "builders" (οἰκοδομοῦντες, oikodomountes) are Israel's leaders who should have recognized and honored Him.

The irony is devastating: the stone the expert builders "rejected" (ἀπεδοκίμασαν, apedokimasan, tested and deemed unworthy) becomes "the head of the corner" (κεφαλὴν γωνίας, kephalēn gōnias, the cornerstone). The cornerstone was the most critical stone in ancient construction, bearing weight and aligning the whole structure. Jesus prophesies His resurrection and exaltation: though rejected and killed, He will be vindicated as the foundation of God's true temple (Ephesians 2:20-22). The builders' expertise becomes their condemnation—they should have recognized the cornerstone but rejected it.

Historical Context

Psalm 118:22 was already understood messianically in first-century Judaism. The psalm was sung during Passover and messianic expectations. Peter later quoted

this verse in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7, identifying Jesus as the rejected-but-exalted stone. Paul developed the temple imagery in Ephesians 2:19-22, describing the church as God's temple built on Jesus the cornerstone. The religious leaders' rejection of Jesus—culminating in crucifixion—paradoxically established Him as the foundation of God's new covenant people.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the cornerstone imagery reveal God's ability to use even human rejection to accomplish His purposes?
2. What does the builders' expert rejection of the cornerstone teach about the danger of religious expertise without spiritual discernment?
3. Why is Jesus' resurrection the ultimate vindication proving He is the cornerstone?

Interlinear Text

ό	δὲ	έμβλέψας	αὐτοῖς	εἶπεν	Tί	οὖν	ἐστιν	τὸ
G3588	And	he beheld	them	and said	What	then	is	G3588
	G1161	G1689	G846	G2036	G5101	G3767	G2076	
γεγραμμένον	τοῦτο·	Λίθον	ὅν	ἀπεδοκίμασαν	οἱ			
that is written		this	The stone	which	rejected			G3588
G1125		G5124	G3037	G3739	G593			
οἰκοδομοῦντες	οὗτος	έγενήθη	εἰς	κεφαλὴν	γωνίας			
the builders	the same	is become	of	the head	the corner			
G3618	G3778	G1096	G1519	G2776	G1137			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 118:22 (Parallel theme): The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

Isaiah 28:16 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Acts 4:11 (Parallel theme): This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Mark 12:10 (Parallel theme): And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

Matthew 21:42 (Parallel theme): Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

Zechariah 3:9 (Parallel theme): For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.
