

Matthew 21:44

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Analysis

And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken (καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται)—The participle πίπτω (piptō, 'to fall') pictures stumbling over the stone (Christ), while συνθλάω (synthlaō, 'to shatter, to break in pieces') shows complete destruction. This alludes to Isaiah 8:14-15, where Yahweh becomes 'a stone of stumbling' to both houses of Israel. Those who reject Christ as cornerstone (21:42) make Him a crushing stone. To fall on the stone is to encounter Christ in His first coming and be broken by offense at His humility.

But on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἀν πέσῃ, λικμήσει αὐτόν)—The verb λικμάω (likmaō, 'to winnow, to grind to powder, to pulverize') pictures total obliteration. This is Christ's second coming in judgment (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45—the stone that crushes kingdoms). The two-fold imagery shows two encounters with Christ: stumble over Him now and be broken in repentance, or have Him fall on you then and be pulverized in judgment. There's no third option—neutral indifference to Christ is impossible.

Historical Context

Jesus spoke this in the temple (21:23) to chief priests and elders after entering Jerusalem (21:1-11). The parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-41) and this stone saying condemned Israel's leaders for rejecting God's messengers and Son. Within 40 years (AD 70), Rome destroyed Jerusalem—the stone fell, grinding the old

covenant order to powder. The Jewish leaders understood Jesus claimed messianic authority (v. 45), hence their rage.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Have you been broken by falling on Christ in repentance, or do you risk Him falling on you in judgment?
2. How does Christ as both stumbling stone (offense) and crushing stone (judgment) reveal the impossibility of neutrality toward Him?

Interlinear Text

Kαὶ ὁ πέσῃ ἐφ' τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται·
And G3588 it shall fall on G3588 stone this shall be broken
G2532 G4098 G1909 G3037 G5126 G4917

ἐφ' ὅν δ' ἀν πέσῃ λικμήσει αὐτόν
on G3739 but whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him
G1909 G1161 G302 G4098 G3039 G846

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:8 (Parallel theme): And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Romans 9:33 (Parallel theme): As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Luke 20:18 (Parallel theme): Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Psalms 2:9 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Zechariah 12:3 (Parallel theme): And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

Matthew 27:25 (Parallel theme): Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

Matthew 26:24 (Parallel theme): The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

1 Thessalonians 2:16 (Parallel theme): Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.