



"To build may have to be the slow and laborious task of years. To destroy can be the thoughtless act of a single day."  
—Winston S. Churchill

**17-Dec-10**

## **Will the Church of God Be Thrown Down? (Part One)**

Just a few days before Jesus observed His last [Passover](#) with His disciples, He gave them two chapters full of prophecy, [parables](#), and other instructions in what has come to be known as the Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24-25; cf. [Matthew 26:1-2](#)). This was precipitated by a seemingly minor interaction that occurred on or near the Temple Mount, just across the Kidron Valley from the Mount of Olives:

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." ([Matthew 24:1-2](#))

To what was [Jesus Christ](#) referring? Was the scope of His answer limited to the physical buildings of the Temple complex, or are there spiritual implications as well? [1 Peter 2:5](#) refers to Christians as "living stones"; is it possible that the church of [God](#), the spiritual Temple, will at some point be

left with "not one stone . . . upon another"? Are we headed for a time of complete disintegration, where the individual believer is connected only to God?

In examining this question, it is important to notice some of the details in what Jesus said. When He asks, "Do you not see all these things?" the word "see" refers to physical observation, not to mental comprehension. In other words, He was drawing attention to their physical surroundings, which is what the phrase "all these things" refers to. This is reinforced by His identification of a specific place: "not one stone shall be left *here* upon another."

The other synoptic gospels likewise indicate that Jesus Christ had the physical Temple in mind when He spoke of total dissolution:

- Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, *see what manner of stones and what buildings* are here!" And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see *these great buildings*? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." ( [Mark 13:1-2](#), emphasis ours throughout)
- Then, *as some spoke of the temple*, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, "*These things which you see*—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." ([Luke 21:5-6](#))

If we wanted to broaden the scope of "all these things" in [Matthew 24:2](#) to include what He spoke about before this, it would still not include the spiritual Temple. The majority of chapter 23 is a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees—clearly not believers in Christ and not part of the spiritual Temple. The part of the chapter not directed at the Pharisees—His final comments before chapter 24 begins—is a lament over Jerusalem, and by implication, its *carnal* people:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but

you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" ([Matthew 23:37-39](#))

Luke's gospel also contains a lament over Jerusalem by Christ, and it contains the only other reference to stones being completely dispersed:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your [peace](#)! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; *and they will not leave in you one stone upon another*, because you did not know the time of your visitation." ([Luke 19:41-44](#))

The *Amplified Bible* clarifies the phrase "the time of your visitation" with this note: "that is, when God was visiting you, the time in which God showed Himself gracious toward you and offered you salvation through Christ." To summarize, because of Jerusalem's rejection of God, she would be left so desolate that no structure would remain. This was fulfilled in AD 70, when the Roman Emperor Titus leveled the city and destroyed the Temple. The church remained intact, though, having been warned to flee in advance.

Thus, we see that the predominate focus of [Matthew 24:2](#) is on the physical Temple and its environs, and that Christ's words have already had one physical fulfillment. But what about the apostle Peter's likening of us to "living stones"? It is vital to understand Peter's overall instruction, for what happens to the stones in his writing is the *opposite* of what happens to the stones in the synoptic gospels:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, *are being built up a spiritual house*, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ([1 Peter 2:4-5](#))

While the dead stones of Herod's Temple were separated from each other, the living stones of God's spiritual house are being *built up*! Jesus Christ, the

Chief Cornerstone, used the same word in telling Peter that "on this rock [Himself] I will *build My church*, and the gates of Hades shall *not* prevail against it" ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Christ's church—that spiritual organism—is being *built up*, not torn down!

Paul uses a similar metaphor in his first epistle to the church in Corinth:

For we [ministers] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are God's building*. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder *I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it*. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ([I Corinthians 3:9-11](#))

He employs similar language when writing to the Ephesians:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, *in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*. ([Ephesians 2:19-22](#))

Notice the positive progress in these passages, and the sense that the building of God's spiritual Temple continues unabated—and as Jesus promised, the gates of the grave will not prevail against it. It will always exist in some form. For [Matthew 24:2](#) to refer to spiritual stones, it would mean that not one Christian is left on Jesus Christ—the Cornerstone! Yet who are Christians, if not living stones on top of the foundation of Jesus Christ?

Next time, we will look at what the Bible says about the structure of the church, and especially what the church looks like just before Christ's return—and we will see that it does not resemble individual stones scattered around the countryside.

- David C. Grabbe

## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Living Stones in God's House](#)**

by Staff

Solomon's glorious Temple must have been a sight to behold. God's church, however, is His Temple now—and each of us living stones in it. Several analogies are drawn between the construction of the First Temple and our preparation for God's Kingdom.

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