

# Living Stones In God's House

by Staff

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Excitement is in the air. A tingling sense of expectation courses through the crowd. The king—King Solomon himself—is about to appear, but that is just a small part of the buzz. Israelites from Dan to Beersheba are gasping in awe at the most beautiful structure they have ever seen: the new Temple of God.

What was once Araunah's rough threshing floor has been transformed into a glorious Temple Mount, complete with Temple glistening in the early sunshine, magnificent courtyards, ornate walls, myriads of priests in their special garb, and countless Levites scurrying to get everything ready. Children gape at the 120,000 sheep and 22,000 bulls that will be sacrificed this day (I Kings 8:63). The bleating and lowing of the animals add to the sounds, excitement and pathos of the day. Not only are thousands of Israelites here, but also numerous royal guests and courtiers from kingdoms far and wide have assembled to honor Israel's God and pay homage to their king.

As a visitor takes in the sights and sounds, he marvels at the large white boulders forming the Temple's walls. He hears men explaining to all within earshot about the tasks they performed in constructing the marvelous edifice. One quarryman, showing his son a huge, polished stone, explains how masons quarried and cut it to exact specifications so it could be inserted perfectly as part of the Temple wall. The little boy wonders how that huge stone got from the quarry site to the Temple Mount. His father smiles and with unmasked pride tells the story of *that* rock, for it was one he personally finished.

This scene may seem a long way off in time, but it is really quite current. We do not often think of ourselves in terms of such a Temple stone, but we are! God, through the apostle Peter, calls us special stones that He is shaping and polishing to be part of an even more glorious Temple, the holy House of God:

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. (I Peter 2:4-5)

Solomon's Temple was only a *type* of the true House of God, the real Temple, the church of God (I Corinthians 3:17; II Corinthians 6:16). Solomon's building was the "Temple of God" because of God's presence, and so it is today. God now lives in *us* by His Holy Spirit, just as His *shekinah* glory hovered above the golden Mercy Seat covering the Ark in the Holy of Holies. If God is active and present in us, we are living stones and part of His spiritual Temple.

Just as the Temple had many types of stones, rocks and boulders making up the foundation, flooring, walls, roof and pillars, so will God's spiritual Temple. The spiritual Temple of God is a work in progress. Undoubtedly, God is excited to see its different elements taking shape. He is building us, as living stones in a living Temple, "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Jesus Himself says that a well-constructed house is built on the rock (Matthew 7:24-25). The foundation of the spiritual Temple has been laid and cannot be changed (I Corinthians 3:11); Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which He builds His church (Matthew 16:18). The eminent Jewish historian Josephus says about the foundation of Solomon's Temple: "Now, therefore, the king laid the foundations of the temple very deep in the ground, and the materials were strong stones, and such as would resist the force of time" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.3.2). Impressive, certainly, but the spiritual Temple's foundations are even deeper!

Now the rest of the Temple stones are being prepared and finished: us, God's called-out ones. It will instruct us to study a few of the types and analogies we can glean from Solomon's Temple, remembering that we are "living stones" that make up the holy new Temple.

### **The Peaceful Assembly**

Have you been to a construction site lately? Stop and listen. It is a noisy place. One will hear the banging of hammers, the rasping of saws, the blaring of radios, and the rumbling of truck engines. It is not a quiet and peaceful environment. A most fascinating aspect of Solomon's Temple is that it rose in a peaceful, quiet environment: "And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built" (I Kings 6:7).

Josephus adds:

Now the whole structure of the temple was made, with great skill, of polished stones, and those laid together so very harmoniously and smoothly, that there appeared to the spectators no sign of any hammer, or other instrument of architecture, but as if, without any use of them, the entire materials had naturally united themselves together, that the agreement of one part with another seemed rather to have been natural than to have arisen from the force of tools upon them. (*ibid.*)

What a beautiful picture! This is what will happen when God completes *His* Temple! Living stones will come from all around the world, from different "quarries." God needs gems, stones and boulders of different shapes, sizes, materials and colors to finish His beautiful House. Thus, God is calling people from all personality types, backgrounds, races, and strengths so each can be the precise stone He needs in a specific place in His Temple.

There will be many needs, tasks, jobs, and projects in God's Kingdom. He knows exactly what "stone" He wants and where He needs it. We are those stones, planned for a specific spot for which God is preparing us. Because of His grace, blessings and gifts, we will be fulfilling a precise role in His holy Temple.

### **The Assembly Point**

The quarry is wherever we are now, where God is cutting, shaping, and polishing us to fit into the masterpiece He is building. We lose sight of this sometimes because we do not see the whole Temple coming together. How could we? We are still in the quarry where all we can see are a few other stones perhaps similar to ourselves. We cannot see the stones from the other quarries: first-century

Christians, patriarchs, prophets, kings, true Christians throughout history, or even all the believers alive today. We do not see the whole picture yet—and will not—until all the stones arrive at the Temple Mount.

I Kings 5:17-18 records: "And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple. So Solomon's builders, Hiram's builders, and the Gebalites quarried them; and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple." Much of the rock chosen was probably the hard white limestone found near Jerusalem, but Solomon's builders found many other beautiful stones, boulders and pillars from all over the known world.

Blocks of stone, or granite, or marble are not hewn out of a rock mass easily. If rocks could speak, they would probably complain bitterly about the harshness of the chisel and saw. We too are required to endure hardships and setbacks. Suffering is part of the process of quarrying, sizing, polishing and preparing us, the living stones, for our roles in God's Kingdom.

In I Peter 5:10, Peter prays, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." The hewing, chipping, sizing, and polishing are all vital parts to making each stone fit the Architect's blueprints please the Master Builder, God the Father. The church is His House, the "House of God" (I Timothy 3:15).

Even Jesus experienced "the quarry," as God perfected Him for His dual role as High Priest and King of Kings, by what He suffered:

[Jesus], in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:7-9)

A great deal of sacrifice awaits us once we commit ourselves to the salvation process, which prepares us for our responsibilities in the Temple of God. That process is not all fun! If we do not feel the shaping going on, we will. It must! Many valuable stones lose as much as *sixty percent* of their initial size and mass before they are considered finished as beautiful jewels. We must sacrifice significant parts of our lives, habits, cultures, reasoning, and values to be *transformed* into one of God's jewels (Malachi 3:17), a gem fit for our Master, which is His will and desire for each of us (Romans 12:1-2).

### **God Will Finish It**

The quarry work equates to the trials we go through during our conversion. Some of it is correction, given lovingly by the Master Artisan. During this process, especially when things seem rough, we can easily feel we will never "make it." This would be true except for the work of the Master Artisan.

In a parallel analogy, God likens Himself to a Potter and us to clay (Isaiah 29:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6). The clay cannot make itself into a vessel of honor (Romans 9:21), but the Master Potter has the necessary skills. It is no different with stone in the Temple. By itself, a freshly quarried block of marble will never end up like the polished marble masterpiece across the yard.

God is absolutely confident He will have a holy, spiritual Temple in the end, which will make the glory of the former Temple pale in comparison (Haggai 2:8-9). A competent builder knows his project is as good as done because he is confident in his ability to plan, build and finish it. How much more this applies to Almighty God!

God is so sure He will finish this task that He talks about it as if it is already accomplished! Paul uses past tense verbs: God has "prepared [us] beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:23), and He has already "delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Notice the certainty of Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

If we cooperate with the Builder, we need not doubt either. The apostle Paul confidently states, as he awaits execution, that he knows a crown of righteousness awaits him (II Timothy 4:6-8). He reminds us that God will give a crown to all who love Christ's appearing (verse 8).

### **The Temple Comes Together**

After God has planned, selected, hewn out, polished and finished every piece, stone, pillar, and block, they must be transported to the assembly point. There, the Temple comes together quietly. All the parts of the Temple, from all over the world, are conveyed to one place and assembled in peace and quiet. In Solomon's day, the Temple rose on a historic spot, Mount Moriah, where Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac (II Chronicles 3:1; Genesis 22:1-2). Traditionally, it is believed to be the peak now covered by the Dome of the Rock.

When and how does this happen for the holy spiritual Temple of God? We are clearly told in I Thessalonians 4:16-18; I Corinthians 15:50-52; Matthew 24:27-31; and Revelation 15:2. The last trump sounds its loud, triumphant peal, the voice of a mighty archangel thundering. Earthquakes, thunder and lightning spread over the earth. Jesus describes His return as lightning flashing across a night sky, visible to every person in the world. He first resurrects those who have died in the faith. Then those still alive are changed into glorious spirit beings faster than one can blink an eye. The saints, now like Christ, see Him as He is. Christ will send His angels to gather the living stones to Him in the air, and upon Him they assemble as God's Temple. Each one fits in a preordained position representing a specific role.

Our places in the Temple are foreordained, foreknown as surely as the apostles knew Jesus was preparing them to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Jesus, the prophets and apostles form the strong underpinnings on which the Temple derives strength. Some living stones will form the flooring, others will rise as walls, and some will function as supports. A few, the Philadelphians, will be pillars connecting the superstructure to the foundation (Revelation 3:12).

The holy Temple of God—His family and church—assembles so perfectly that Paul uses the expressions "fitly framed" (Ephesians 2:21, KJV) or "joined and knit together" (4:16). Tradition says not even a thin knife blade could be inserted between the stones. When God gives us the position He has planned for us, we will be amazed at how perfectly we fit.

When Solomon's Temple stones were put together, in many cases, it was the first time those particular stones had ever been in proximity to each other. We may find ourselves working with other spirit-born members of God's household from millennia ago, with whom we fit so perfectly that all will be amazed. David says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

### **The Temple Dedication**

Realizing the Temple's significance, Solomon waited eleven months from the time its construction ended before dedicating it just before the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel would be in Jerusalem (I Kings 7:2). Some commentators surmise this occurred during a jubilee year as well.

How perfect! When Jesus returns with his Bride, who will also be the living Temple of God, He will liberate this world from Satan and sin. It will be the actual fulfillment of the meaning of the Jubilee, when debts are forgiven, captives set free, and everyone receives a new start!

Solomon dedicates the Temple with much dignity, pomp and ceremony (I Kings 8; II Chronicles 5-6). God inspires him to dedicate it with a noble, humble and worshipful prayer (I Kings 8:22-61), followed by a fourteen-day feast accompanied by lavish sacrifices. God shows His pleasure and acceptance by filling His House with a cloud so profound that the priests must leave the building. This signified to all present, including the vast foreign entourage, that the sovereign God was there.

The King will host a marriage supper for His Son and His Bride when the real Temple—the sons and daughters of God—assemble to form the true House of God. Jesus sets the tone for His new order by serving the Bride. Surely, Solomon's dedication is but a type of what will be the most glorious dedication ever witnessed in the universe, any time, anywhere.

We are handpicked stones, chosen by God the Father Himself; we are on the Builder's spiritual blueprints. Sometimes the construction is painful, but the result is worth it. It will work out best for us if we cooperate with Him in His work, chipping out what He does not want, shaping and polishing what He does. If we focus on His righteousness, grace, love and strength, we will get through this essential finishing process.

What a glorious new Temple God is constructing! When we take our places in it, our lives will finally make sense, and we will be prepared exactly for our place. What a glorious time that will be!