

Parable Of The Two Builders

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Palestine is naturally a land of hills and mountains, and as a result, it is subject to violent rains and sudden floods. The Jordan River annually swells to dangerous levels and becomes rapid and furious. The streams that run through the hills can suddenly swell with rain and spill tremendous amounts of water onto the plains below, sweeping everything before them. Houses erected within reach of these sudden deluges—especially those founded on sand or other unreliable foundation—cannot stand before them. The rising stream shakes a house to its foundation and erodes away its base until it falls. Rocks are common there, however, so it is not hard to find a solid foundation.

With this in mind, Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by illustrating the benefit of obeying His words. It is not enough to hear them; they must be obeyed. He compares a person who hears and obeys Him to a man who builds his house on a rock. Introducing the Parable of the Two Builders (Matthew 7:21-28), He says, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man" (verse 24). He then describes this wise man as building his house, that is, his whole life, on the rock of genuine subjection to God. Conversely, the disobedient use unfit material as the foundation of their lives.

1. What does the foundation of rock represent? Luke 6:48; Matthew 7:24; Deuteronomy 32:1-4; Psalm 18:2, 46; I Corinthians 3:10-11.

Comment: Luke describes the wise builder as digging deep and laying the foundation on a rock. The Rock on which we build is Christ Himself. In this parable, Christ teaches us the importance of doing as well as hearing. In His description of the two builders, He judges them, not only by their care in building their houses, but also by the foundation on which they build. A rock foundation represents true understanding and right action—true conviction and commitment manifested in righteousness. Only in obedience and dedication to a personal relationship with Christ the Rock can we find emotional and spiritual stability—without which even our most dedicated purposes rest on shifting sand.

2. What does the foundation of sand represent? Matthew 7:26; Luke 6:49; II Samuel 22:4-5.

Comment: Christ knew that some coming to build would be attracted to a ready-prepared level surface of sand rather than to sites that must be excavated to reach the hard and rugged rock. Human nature often chooses what looks easy on the surface. But after the seasonal floods, representing trials and tests, such a builder would have nothing left but a heap of ruins. A sandy foundation represents empty preference and mere external religion based on false knowledge. The sand reflects the shifting, uncertain feelings some foolish people possess, the only ground upon which they act. The second house, even though most impressive, stands on a shifting foundation, and is therefore doomed to destruction. People whose resolves do not rest on God's help sought in prayer—people who have virtues without root—live in a dangerous position. The Pharisees built their hopes on external blessings and privileges, which alienated their minds from the Rock of their salvation. Christ had to tell them that Satan, not Abraham, was their father.

3. What do the builders represent? Matthew 7:24, 26; Luke 6:47-49; Psalm 111:10; James 3:13-17.

Comment: In the wise and foolish builders, Christ describes two categories in illustrating the building of a house. Both houses appear equally attractive and substantial, but their comparative stability differs greatly. In their construction, the materials and labor used were similar, and both houses appeared upright, solid, and sound. Many times, seemingly good people who are uncalled seem to build their lives well and wisely in terms of money, material possessions, and friends. All these things seem good to the human mind, but their end can be disastrous without a Rock foundation. The elect of God build their houses differently, by daily obedience, service, overcoming, Bible study, and prayer.

4. What do the rain, floods, and wind represent? Matthew 7:25, 27; II Samuel 2:5; Ezekiel 13:8-16; James 1:12-18.

Comment: Floods and hurricanes can damage seemingly strong houses and destroy those less strongly built. When Christ says, "the rain descended," He compares the times of testing to the forces of a rainstorm threatening the roof of the house and the fears it creates. "The floods came" pictures turbulent torrents undermining walls. "The winds blew" depicts sweeping, hurricane-like winds threatening a house's walls. These combined natural forces remind us that spiritual elements try and test our spiritual houses just as God tested and punished Israel. Sometimes these forces come in the way of persecution, suffering, or temptations—all of which will erode a weak foundation, but not a solid one. Christ describes the disaster descending on the house built on the sand as "great [in] its fall." By doing so, He warns us to avoid a similar end. Foolish builders should heed His warning and build on a solid Rock foundation, that of Jesus Christ.