

# Psalm 118:22-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-118/psalm-11822-23/>

*The Psalmist punctuates his poetic narrative with a memorable architectural metaphor. He says that the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

*The psalmist originally applied this to himself. But it also applies to the Messiah.*

*Jesus and New Testament writers use this prophecy to explain how Jesus's rejection by the religious leaders of Israel did not disqualify Him from being the LORD's Messiah.*

King David, the likely psalmist, interrupts his poetic narrative about the LORD delivering him to make a *marvelous* observation. He makes this *marvelous* observation with an architectural metaphor to describe how he was rejected but triumphant.

The psalmist comments: *The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone* (v 22).

In the days before steel beams, stones were the construction material of choice to strengthen structures. *Builders* inspected *stones* to determine their best use. Some *stones* were *rejected* and deemed unusable for construction, while other *stones* were highly prized for their capability.

The biggest and strongest *stones* were selected to be used in the foundation of the building. The *chief corner stone* was the strongest and best *stone* of all because it would be used to support the weight of the entire building. The *cornerstone* (or keystone) of a building or an arch gives the structure its shape and strong foundation. It is the most important of all the *stones*.

This metaphor within Psalm 118 expresses a common theme throughout the Old Testament. The theme is this: God often overlooks the strong and selects the weak to accomplish His purposes.

This theme is expressed in countless ways:

- God chose the elderly Abraham and Sarah to give birth to His people. (Genesis 12:1-6, Hebrews 11:8-12)
- God's promise flowed through Jacob instead of his older brother Esau. (Malachi 1:2-3, Romans 9:13)
- God used stammering Moses to speak on His behalf before Pharaoh. (Exodus 4:10)
- God summoned the enslaved children of Israel to be His nation. (Deuteronomy 4:20, 5:6)

- God called skittish Gideon to lead His people against the Midianites. (Judges 6:11-16)

All of these examples fit the pattern that Jesus the Messiah later taught: “But many who are first will be last; and the last, first” (Matthew 19:30).

What is likely being immediately referenced in the psalmist’s architectural metaphor is how God chose the young, inexperienced, and perhaps illegitimate David to be the King of Israel (1 Samuel 16:7).

Overarching all these illustrations is God choosing humans over the angels to rule over His creation (Psalm 8:2; see commentary on [Psalm 8](#) and [Hebrews 2](#) ).

In this metaphor, *the rejected stone which*, David says, later becomes *the chief corner stone* has four different meanings: 1. King David; 2. Israel; 3. The foundation of the second temple; 4. The Messiah.

### 1. King David

The first meaning for *the rejected stone* is that it represents King David. David was referring to himself when he wrote this line. When Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse’s sons, the youngest, David, was overlooked and “rejected” even by his own family (1 Samuel 16:6-11).

But *the LORD* chose David to *become* the king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:12). *This was the LORD’S doing and it was marvelous* [surprising] *in the eyes* of David’s family. Because of *the LORD*, David would go onto *become* the greatest king in Israel’s history (to this date).

### 2. Israel

The first meaning for *the rejected stone* is that it represents the nation of Israel. Israel was hardly the type of people one would expect to become a great and mighty nation. They were first nomadic, then enslaved in Egypt.

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

*The LORD* goes on to remind the people of Israel, through His servant Moses:

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you.” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8a)

Like a *stone which was rejected by the builders*, so too was the nation of Israel *rejected* and little regarded by the surrounding empires throughout most of its existence. And yet these *rejected* people would be the nation that *the LORD* would use to bless the entire world (Genesis 12:3,

Exodus 19:6). To the astonishment of others, *the LORD* would marvelously use the nation of Israel to be *the chief cornerstone* in establishing His kingdom upon the earth.

### 3. The Foundation of the Second Temple

A third meaning for *the rejected stone* concerns the prophetic rebuilding of the temple after the people returned from exile. It refers to the literal *corner stone* of the temple laid by Zerubbabel. That chief corner stone laid by Zerubbabel kept its place against many adversaries,

“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”  
(Zechariah 4:6-7)

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.”  
(Zechariah 4:8)

### 4. The Messiah

The fourth meaning for *the rejected stone* refers to the Messiah. The imagery of the Messiah as the capstone or *chief corner stone* is reflected in the prophecies of Isaiah,

“Then He shall become a sanctuary;  
But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,  
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”  
(Isaiah 8:14)

“Therefore thus says the Lord God,  
‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,  
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.  
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.’”  
(Isaiah 28:16)

Psalm 22, and the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) prophetically describe the manner in which the builders (priests and elders) *rejected* the Messiah as *the chief corner stone*.

*The corner stone* of Psalm 118 refers to Jesus the Messiah, who was both *rejected by* His own people (John 1:11) but Whom *the LORD has made* the foundation of our salvation (1 Corinthians 3:11).

After Jesus rose from the dead, Peter quoted Psalm 118:22-23 during his own trial, as he tried to persuade the Sanhedrin that Jesus was the Messiah, “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone” (Acts 4:11)

Jesus the Messiah, even referred to Himself as this *cornerstone* (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20:17).

Upon entering the temple, shortly after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus the Messiah referenced this scripture when challenged by the religious leaders who rejected Him, by applying this metaphor to Himself,

“Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes?’”  
(Matthew 21:42)

Jesus said this just after He told the priests and elders in the temple “The Parable of the Landowner” (Matthew 21:33-41). This parable depicted wicked vine-growers who killed the landowner’s servants and son when they were sent to collect the produce on the owner’s behalf.

The parable prophetically foretold how these priests would plot to kill Jesus and do so to advance their own authority. But it also served as a warning for them to recognize that God had sent His Son to them and that instead of murdering Him, they should listen to Him.

Like this *corner stone*, Jesus was both *rejected* by the religious leaders and His own people (Matthew 27:22, John 1:11) and yet Jesus was chosen by God to be the chief *corner stone* of our salvation.

Peter and Paul often quoted or alluded to David’s prophetic metaphor from Psalm 118 to demonstrate to others how Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 4:11, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:5-8).

All four interpretations of *the builders’ rejected stone*: 1.) King David, 2.) the Nation of Israel, 3.) the Temple Foundation, 4.) Jesus as the Messiah—are all true at the same time, but the fourth meaning of *the builders’ rejected stone* is the most *marvelous in our eyes* (v 23).

*This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes* (v 23).

The word—*this*—refers to *the LORD*’s selecting of the Messiah and His allowance for Him to go unrecognized and even *rejected* and killed by His people (Isaiah 53:6b, 10). Once people realize what *the LORD* has done for us—given His own Son for our salvation (John 3:16)—we will be astonished. It will be *marvelous in our eyes*.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>22</sup> The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. <sup>23</sup> This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.**