



April 27, 2008
Study Guide & Daily Readings
(Last in Series: Milestones)

The Capstone

1 Peter — General Remarks

1 Peter is addressed to the Christians of Asia Minor. It sought to encourage them as they faced persecution and rejection because of their faith. The basis theme of this letter is to provide encouragement to the beleaguered Christian. Persecution is eminent. The return of Christ is referred to seven times as a means to remind the reader to keep the hope which only God can vindicate alive among the followers of Christ.

Peter wants the reader to know that new life through baptism is a radical departure from the old patterns of conduct. Not only are there specific instructions for husbands, wives, and servants; there are clear directives to believers in Christ that they are to be distinctly different from their non-believing neighbors.

1 Peter 2:4-10

In this part of the letter, Peter speaks to the nature of the church as the new people of God. Here he develops the metaphor of a *spiritual dwelling*. The nature of the church is suggested as he describes the building of the house with *living stones of believers*. The house is also described as *a race, a priesthood, a nation and a people*. This is one of the best descriptions of the church in the New Testament. As such, the definition of a Christian is to live within the community of God's people.

Peter quotes the Old Testament generously here. He quotes Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 8:14 and Psalm 118:22 in describing the stone on which the body of believers depend. In Isaiah, the stone being laid is a *cornerstone*. As a building pushes out, the interlocking cornerstones must be the strongest and most carefully laid. The cornerstones on or built into the foundation are particularly important. Christ is our cornerstone. Christ is the stone on which everything else depends — our strength.

The stone described in the Psalm passage has a different function. It is the *capstone* or *keystone*. In the NRSV of the Bible, the passage from Psalm 118 is translated the same as those from Isaiah – cornerstone. Closer examination of the text both in Psalm 118 and 1 Peter reveals that the word is closer to a capstone or keystone. This is the last stone laid in the building of an arch. This capstone, located in the middle of the arch at its highest point, holds all the weight of the arch and keeps the opening from collapsing.

Christ is our capstone. All our lives depend on our relationship to Christ. Just as the capstone sits in the middle at the highest point bearing the weight of all the other stones, so Christ is our strength and focus. All is dependent on Christ.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

Peter speaks directly to our self-image as followers of Christ. In Asia Minor in the first century, the early Christians were being rejected, ridiculed and persecuted. Our identity is nobler in 21st century America, but often compromised by our willingness to mix the ideas of the world with those of Christ's radical claim on our lives. Our challenge is more subtle as we face a culture focused on self-concern, hedonistic indulgence, and the corruption of God's purpose for all.

Peter declares that the function of the church is to **declare the wonderful deeds** (verse 9) of God's redeeming love by offering **spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ** (verse 5).

We are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own special people who once had no identity as a people, but are now the people of God. That description should give us confidence in living. It is the image of Christ that is available to us. As Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (*Galatians 2:20*)

Just as this letter encouraged the early believer to stand up to the retribution of that day, so we are called to claim the identity – the self-image that is ours. We should be proclaiming the praises of God who has called us into God's marvelous light (verse 9). We, who have not obtained mercy, have now obtained mercy (verse 10).

Daily Readings

Please note: These readings allow you to study New Testament passages that deal with the divine call to be a disciple of Christ. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, April 28 – Read Romans 12

Paul is dealing with spiritual gifts. When writing about the gifts of the spirit, the emphasis in this letter is on right behavior, while the emphasis in the letter to Corinth is on unity and order. Compare verses 3-8 to the passages in 1 Corinthians 12. How are they the same? How are they different?

Tuesday, April 29 – Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Again Paul is speaking of spiritual gifts. Here he deals with both the ethical issues of right living and the unifying nature of God's spirit. Take some time alone to list out the gifts of the spirit as described in Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12. Can you identify your gift?

Wednesday, April 30 – Read John 14:25-27

Jesus promises that we will not be alone. He literally says, "I will not leave you orphaned." The Greek word used to describe the Holy Spirit is literally "comforter" or "advocate." In what areas of your life do you need an advocate? In what areas do you need comfort?

Thursday, May 1 – Read Acts 2:1-4

The church was born with a burst of God's spirit. Luke describes the miracle of Pentecost and the working of the Holy Spirit as a "rush of wind." What other places in the Bible do you remember God's spirit described as wind? Creation? What times in your life can you remember the "wind" of God's spirit on your life?

Friday, April 18 – Read 1 Corinthians 12 again

How can you work for unity and order in our church? What gifts of the Holy Spirit do you see in your life? Can you distinguish between talents and gifts? (*Contact the church office if you are interested in taking a brief test to discover your spiritual gifts.*)