

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Sour Grapes And Justice

Ezekiel 18 is a marvelous chapter on the fairness and justice of God. Its message is in an Old Testament setting, but it portrays an attribute of God which is unchanged; and it should be read today — with care.

The Israelites had a proverb: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge — by which they blamed their troubles on an earlier generation. God said, yes, your fathers sinned, but ye have done evil more than your fathers. Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. (Jer. 16:10ff. 31:29-30)

The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The physical and environmental consequences of one generation's sin may affect generations to come (Ex. 20:5, 34:7) but God categorically denies that the guilt of one is passed to another. By one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and so spiritual death; but all die (spiritually) for that all have sinned. (Rom. 5:12) THE death (see Greek) and THE righteousness (the extremes, viewed metaphorically) are through or by Adam and Christ respectively. But we are condemned as individuals, on the basis of individual sins; and made righteous, through forgiveness, as we individually come to Christ. (Rom. 5:17-21; Acts 2:38-41) As Ezekiel records: Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Jehovah. (v.30) We have such a God now. (Rom. 2:2-11)

Our text also shows that man can change — from wicked to righteous **and** from righteous to wicked. Free agency is not limited to a one-way street. If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes ... he shall surely live. But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness ... None of his righteous deeds...shall be remembered in his trespass ... and in his sin in them shall he die. (Vs. 21-24)

We are not judged by our past performance. To put it in N.T. words, it is not enough that we once came into God's light; we must continue walking in the light. The Jew pointed to

his ancestry and past glory; and we drag out our baptismal certificate, but God says, "What are you now? Are you striving to follow Me **today**?" If you have been tempted to believe some sort of cloak of righteousness is spread over the impenitent sinner that his past answers for today, read Ezek. 18 carefully. (And study the subjunctive present IF we walk and confess of 1 John 1:7-9.)

God says, through Ezekiel, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, . . . wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." (v. 32). This idea is expressed in 2 Pet. 3:9 where we are told, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The decision, in this life, is ours. We say Yes or No to God — for a time! But we must meet Him in final judgement, where He will determine our eternal destiny. Are we doomed to repeat the errors of Ezekiel's day despite our advantage in Christ??

- Robert F. Turner, via Plain Talk, Aug., 1974

WHAT IS THE ROCK?

QUESTION: "In Matt. 16:18 Jesus said, "That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." What or who is the rock? Could the rock be Peter since Jesus spoke in Aramaic and there was only one word in Aramaic for rock, 'KEPHA, ' the equivalent of which is 'PETROS' (Peter) and 'PETRA' in the Greek? Several commentaries take this position.

ANSWER: Three views are held as to the interpretation of "this rock" in the passage. (1) That Christ himself is the Rock on which the church was to be built. (2) That Peter's confession (v. 16) that Jesus is the Son of God is the Rock. (3) That Peter is the rock.

The first view is supported by scriptures that state that Jesus is the foundation. "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16). "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). There is no question that Jesus is the foundation of the church, but the issue is whether Matt. 16:18 teaches that fact. We must keep in mind that Matt. 16:18-19 is highly figurative and under the imagery of a city that depicts the church, Jesus is the builder of the city — not the foundation. In the same imagery, one person does not serve as different symbols. Hence, Jesus is not the foundation in the text.

In the second view the context lends strong support to its validity. Peter had just confessed, "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). On "this rock," this truth, Jesus said he would build His church. In the INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY, Willoughby Allen wrote, "the PETRA is equivalent to the object of

APEKALUPSE (did reveal) in v. 17. 'Flesh and blood did not reveal it,' i. e. the Messiahship and the divine Sonship of Christ. 'Upon this rock of revealed truth I will build my church.' The play upon PETROS and PETRA means you have given expression to a revealed truth, and your name PETROS suggests a metaphorical name for it. It shall be the PETRA, or rock upon which the Church shall stand" (GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW, 176). This view is what I believe to be the proper and correct interpretation of the passage.

J. W. McGarvey said, "the rock ... can be no other than the truth which Peter had just confessed concerning Jesus" (COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW AND MARK, p. 145). R. C. H. Lenski stated, "she (church) rests on the reality which Peter confessed, namely on Jesus, 'the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, p. 626). R. C. Foster said, "it seems to make a clear picture to hold that the divine truth Peter affirmed is the rock" (THE MIDDLE PERIOD, p. 235).

The third view that Peter is the foundation is supported by Catholics and several Protestants, although with different connotations on the verse. Catholics claim the verse teaches Peter was given supremacy or papal authority. While Protestant scholars repudiate the Catholic claim as presumptuous and without Biblical support, they do maintain that Peter, in a sense, was the rock, the PETRA, on which the church was built.

William Hendriksen affirms that Peter was the foundation in a secondary sense, as well as the other apostles, in what he preached (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). In other words, the apostles laid the foundation of revealed truth. However, Matt. 16:18 says "Peter," not "apostles."

Others, such as Barnes, H. A. W. Meyer, Pulpit Commentary, Vincent and Barclay, advocate that Peter was "the rock," not in the Catholic sense, but as the first to preach to the Jews and the Gentiles, to lay the foundation, the first stone in the church upon which other disciples were built.

But since Jesus himself could not be the foundation in this figure, because he is the builder, in like manner Peter cannot be the foundation in any sense in the metaphor because he is the gatekeeper. He has the keys (v. 19). Therefore, the only plausible alternative is that the truth Peter confessed is the foundation. If Jesus were saying that Peter was to be the foundation, he would have said, "that thou art Peter, and upon you, Peter, will I build my church."

Concerning the Aramaic, NOBODY KNOWS enough about the Aramaic in Jesus time to make a definite judgment. The Palestinian Aramaic of that period is not extant. We do not

even know that Jesus spoke, as his primary language, Aramaic. So a dogmatic argument based on the Aramaic is presumptuous and unconvincing.

Yet, in spite of scanty information about the Aramaic, the INTERPRETER'S BIBLE states, "In Aramaic there would be no separate form to indicate the masculine gender. "You are KEPHA, and on this KEPHA I will build" (Vol. 7, p. 451). But seemingly, there was a distinction made by Jesus in John 1:42. Jesus said to Simon, "thou shalt be called Cephas" (KEPHAS, not KEPHA). Dr. Theodore H. Robinson said, "for there is only one word in Aramaic and, EXCEPT WHEN USED AS A MAN'S NAME (emphasis mine, W. E. W.), is always feminine (THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, p. 141). So, the distinction made by Matthew in PETROS and PETRA was apparently made in the Aramaic by KEPHAS and KEPHA. Therefore, if Jesus spoke in Aramaic, he would have said, "thou art KEPHAS (masculine gender) and upon this KEPHA (feminine gender) I will build my church."

One thing is for certain, and that is that Matthew made a distinction. He recorded Jesus as saying, "thou art Peter (PETROS) and upon this rock (PETRA) I will build my church." The Holy Spirit used the Greek, made a distinction, hence, let's be satisfied with that.

R. C. H. Lenski wrote, "We know too little about the Aramaic to assert that when Jesus spoke these words he used the same Aramaic term in both statements.... Therefore this appeal to the Aramaic substitutes something unknown and hypothetical for what is fully known and insured as true on the basis of the inspired Greek of the holy writers themselves" (ibid, p. 627). Amen! William Hendriksen makes the same observation in his COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW on page 646.

For a more in-depth study of the Aramaic consult THE FINAL WEEK by R. C. Foster, pp. 334-338.

- Weldon E. Warnock, via Searching the Scriptures, Jan., 1985.

- > "Our pressing need today is for less publicity on how to stay young and more on how to grow up!"
- > "The world is full of people who are making a good living but living poor lives!"
- > "There is very little blessing or reward in serving the Lord - conveniently!"
- > "One minute of keeping your mouth shut is worth an hour of explanation!"

> "A man who detests the church ought to go to them at least once a year to make sure that the church has not mended the faults of which he complains!"

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Matthew Middlebrooks will be bringing the sermon from the Bible this morning in our worship hour, Sunday evening: *Bi-monthly Singing!*