

The Old Testament Basis for New Testament Rock Symbolism

Copyright (c) 2006 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

Introduction

Literal significance

In the Old Testament¹ there are three frequently occurring Hebrew or Aramaic words translated "rock" or "stone" (*ʿēben*, *sēlaʿ*, and *ṣūr*).² Of these *ʿēben* is a neutral term that can refer to stones of varying sizes,³ stones being thrown⁴ or moved,⁵ precious or semi-precious stones,⁶ and--by a figure of speech familiar to us as well as the ancient Hebrews--hail.⁷ The word *sēlaʿ*, on the other hand, refers to attached rock such as a crag or cliff.⁸ The word *ṣūr* is roughly synonymous with *sēlaʿ*.⁹

Other terms for rock or stone in the Old Testament include *gāzīt* "dressed stone,"¹⁰ "high-grade stone,"¹¹ "blocks of stone,"¹² "stone mansions,"¹³ *zāwīt* "pillars,"¹⁴ *hāṣāṣ* "gravel,"¹⁵ *hallāmīš* "hard rock,"¹⁶ "flinty crag,"¹⁷ "flinty rock,"¹⁸ "flint,"¹⁹ *sāʿīp* "cleft,"²⁰ *pinnâ* "cornerstone,"²¹ *rēhāyim* "handmill,"²² "millstones,"²³ "pair of millstones,"²⁴ *rēkeb* "upper millstone,"²⁵ *šēn* "cliff,"²⁶ "rocky crag,"²⁷ and *taḥtīt* "lower millstone."²⁸

General figurative uses of rock terminology

All three of the most frequently used words for "rock" or "stone" in the Old Testament can serve as figures of speech and to illustrate points about both situations and people. Some figurative or illustrative uses of *ʿēben*, *sēlaʿ*, and *ṣūr* are now considered, and in addition relevant examples of *pinnâ*.

Hebrew ʿēben. In 1 Kg 10:27 we find the simile that king Solomon "made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones [*kāʿbānîm*], and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills." (See also 2 Chron 1:15.) Exod 15:5 and Neh 9:11 both refer to people sinking in water "like a stone [*ʿēben*]."²⁹ The word *ʿēben* is used to illustrate motionlessness (Exod 15:16 [*hāʿāben*]), the hardness of ice in contrast to water (Job 38:30 [*kāʿāben*]), and the impenetrability of leviathan's ribcage (Job 41:24[16] [*ʿāben*]). In Ezek 11:19 and 36:26 the metaphor of a "heart of stone [*lēb ʿēben*]" is used to illustrate an obstinate and unfeeling attitude. In Hab 2:11 rocks are personified: "The stones [*ʿēben*] of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it." Thus, a variety of literary figures are used in connection with the word *ʿēben*. Job's simple metaphor of strength is representative, "Do I have the strength of stone [*kōʿh ʿbānîm*]? Is my flesh bronze?" (Job 6:12).

Hebrew séla^c. Compared to *ʿében* the word *séla^c* is limited in its range of nonliteral meanings. In Isa 32:2 we find the simile that "Each man will be like the shadow of a great rock [*séla^c-kābēd*] in a thirsty land." And in Jer 5:3 the prophet complains of the people he has been dealing with that "They made their faces harder than stone [*misséla^c*] and refused to repent." But to sink in water (cf. Exod 15:5) an object must be small enough to be moved into water, which is not the case with *séla^c*, and due to the size of the object in question *séla^c* could hardly be used to illustrate commonness as the author of 1 Kg 10:27 (cited earlier) does with *ʿében*. The nature of the object determines the kind of point it can be used to make when used figuratively.³⁰

Hebrew šûr. Isa 51:1-2 contains the metaphor of a quarry.³¹ God says, "'Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock [*šûr*] from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.'" The point of the passage is apparently that God, who had blessed the patriarchs in so marked a way, was still willing to bless His people in a later age if they would turn to Him.

As stated above, *séla^c* and *šûr* are roughly synonymous. One special connotation of *šûr* not shared by *séla^c*, however, is that of sharpness, as in Ps 89:43(44): "You have turned back the edge [*šûr*] of his sword and have not supported him in battle."³²

Hebrew pinnâ. In four cases *pinnâ* "corner" (here "cornerstone") is used symbolically to refer to trusted leaders of the people. The term *pinnâ* in and of itself just means "corner."³³ But whenever the context or an added word such as *ʿében* "stone" indicates that building materials are specifically referred to the meaning is "cornerstone,"³⁴ and here that meaning is extended further to include individuals who are so dependable and important that they share selected attributes of a cornerstone.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Judg 20:2 | The leaders [<i>pinnôt</i>] of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand soldiers armed with swords. |
| 1 Sam 14:38 | Saul therefore said, "Come here, all you who are leaders [<i>pinnôt</i>] of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today." |
| Isa 19:13 | The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived; the cornerstones [<i>pinnat</i>] of her peoples have led Egypt astray. |
| Zech 10:4 | From Judah will come the cornerstone [<i>pinnâ</i>], from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. |

Rock Symbolism that Makes Reference to God in the Old Testament

Poetic passages

One of the most striking features of Old Testament rock symbolism is that it is used to describe, and even address, God.³⁵ All three of the most common words meaning "rock" or "stone" are used in poetry to make symbolic reference to God. A list of passages is given below according to the Hebrew word used in any given case.

Hebrew ʿēben. The Hebrew word *ʿēben* is used with poetic reference to God five times in four passages. These are now quoted.

- Gen 49:24 But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock [*ʿēben*] of Israel."
- Psa 118:22 The stone [*ʿēben*] the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [*lʿrôṣ pinnâ*],³⁶ (NIV margin)
- Isa 8:13-14 (13) "The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, (14) and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone [*ʾûlʿēben*] that causes men to stumble and a rock [*ʾûlʿsâr*] that makes them fall."
- Isa 28:16 So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See I lay a stone [*ʿāben*] in Zion, a tested stone [*ʿēben*], a precious cornerstone [*pinnat yiqrat*] for a sure foundation [*mûssād mûssād*]; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."

Hebrew sélaʿ. The Hebrew word *sélaʿ* is used with poetic reference to God five times in five passages.

- 2 Sam 22:2-3 (2) He said: "The Lord is my rock [*salʿi*], my fortress and my deliverer; (3) my God is my rock [*šûrî*], in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation."
- Psa 18:2(3) The Lord is my rock [*salʿi*], my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock [*šûrî*], in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
- Psa 31:3(4) Since you are my rock [*salʿi*] and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- Psa 42:9(10) I say to God my Rock [*salʿi*], "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

Ps 71:3 Be my rock [*l'šûr*] of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock [*salî*] and my fortress.

Hebrew šûr. The word *šûr* is used thirty-seven times in poetic reference to a deity--over seven times more frequently than either *ʿében* or *séla*. These thirty-seven references occur in twenty-four different chapters of Scripture. I say "a deity" instead of "God" because in two cases (Deut 32:30, 31) the Israelite poet is referring to objects and beliefs of his non-Israelite neighbors.³⁷

Deut 32:4 "He is the Rock [*haššûr*], his works are perfect, and all his ways are just."

Deut 32:15 "He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock [*šûr*] his Savior."

Deut 32:18 "You deserted the Rock [*šûr*], who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth."

Deut 32:30-31 "How could one man chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock [*šûrām*] had sold them, unless the Lord had given them up? (31) For their rock [*šûrām*] is not like our Rock [*k'šûrênû*], as even our enemies concede."³⁸

Deut 32:37-38 (37) "He will say: 'Now where are their gods, the rock [*šûr*] they took refuge in, (38) the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up to help you! Let them give you shelter!'"

1 Sam 2:2 "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock [*šûr*] like our God."

2 Sam 22:2-3 (2) He said: "The Lord is my rock [*salî*], my fortress and my deliverer; (3) my God is my rock [*šûrî*], in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation."

2 Sam 22:32 "For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock [*šûr*] except our God?"

2 Sam 22:47 "The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock [*šûrî*]! Exalted be God, the Rock [*sûr*], my Savior!

2 Sam 23:3 "The God of Israel spoke, the Rock [*šûr*] of Israel said to me: . . ."

Ps 18:2(3) The Lord is my rock [*salî*], my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock [*šûrî*], in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.³⁹

Ps 18:31(32) For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock [*šûr*] except our God?

Ps 18:46(47) The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock [*šûrî*]! Exalted be God my Savior!

- Ps 19:14(15) May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock [*ṣûrî*] and my Redeemer.
- Ps 28:1 To you I call, O Lord my Rock [*ṣûrî*]; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.
- Ps 31:2(3) Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge [*l'ṣûr mā'ōz*] a strong fortress to save me.
- Ps 61:2(3) From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock [*b'ṣûr*] that is higher than I.
- Ps 62:2(3) He alone is my rock [*ṣûrî*] and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
- Ps 62:6-7(7-8) He alone is my rock [*ṣûrî*] and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock [*ṣûr-uzzî*], my refuge.
- Ps 71:3 Be my rock of refuge [*l'ṣûr mā'ōn*], to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock [*sal'î*] and my fortress.
- Ps 73:26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength [*ṣûr*] of my heart and my portion forever.
- Ps 78:35 They remembered that God was their Rock [*ṣûrām*]; that God Most High was their Redeemer.
- Ps 89:26(27) "He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock [*w'ṣûr*] my Savior."
- Ps 92:15(16) proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock [*ṣûrî*], and there is no wickedness in him."
- Ps 94:22 But the Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock [*l'ṣur*] in whom I take refuge.
- Ps 95:1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock [*l'ṣûr*] of our salvation.
- Ps 144:1 Praise be to the Lord, my Rock [*ṣûrî*], who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.
- Isa 8:13-14 (13) "The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, (14) and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone [*ûl'ēben*] that causes men to stumble and a rock [*ûl'ṣûr*] that makes them fall."

- Isa 17:10 You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock [*w^éšûr*], your fortress.
- Isa 26:4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock [*šûr*] eternal.
- Isa 30:29 And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock [*šûr*] of Israel.
- Isa 44:8 "You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no Rock [*šûr*]; I know not one."
- Hab 1:12 O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock [*w^éšûr*], you have ordained them to punish.

Prose passages that have messianic significance

There are two related passages, with the terms *šûr* and *séla^c* respectively, which cannot be called symbolic and yet deserve to be mentioned in the present context. These are Exod 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13. In Exod 17:6 God says to Moses, "I will stand there before you by the rock [*al-haššûr*] at Horeb. Strike the rock [*baššûr*], and water will come out of it for the people to drink.' So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel." In Num 20:8-11 water is again provided from a rock, but this time Moses is told to speak to the rock instead of striking it:

"Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock [*hasséla^c*] before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock [*hasséla^c*] for the community so they and their livestock can drink." (9) So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. (10) He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock [*hasséla^c*] and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock [*hasséla^c*]?" (11) Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock [*hasséla^c*] twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

In the New Testament (1 Cor 10:4) Paul refers to this experience, applying the rock in both narratives as a symbol for the pre-existent Christ who accompanied Israel in their desert wanderings.

Apocalyptic passages

Hebrew 'ében. The narrative from which Zech 3:9 is drawn is apocalyptic in style. I take the stone figure in this verse as a possible reference to a divine Being for a number of reasons. First, the "seven eyes on that one stone [*'ében*]" would be an appropriate symbol for complete wisdom and any claim to complete wisdom is a claim to deity. And second, when vs. 9 is compared with vs. 8 the symbols used in both verses, although quite different in themselves, appear to have a common referent. Thus, in vs. 8 God tells Zechariah, ""I am going to bring my

servant, the Branch." But when He continues at the beginning of vs. 9 He says, "See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua!"

Zech 3:8-9 (8) "Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. (9) See, the stone [*hāʿēben*] I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone [*ʿēben*], and I will engrave an inscription on it," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day."

If the two symbols of a branch and a stone refer to one Being, a later example of such usage would be in Rev 5 where Christ is at once a Lion (vs. 5) and a Lamb (vs. 6).

Aramaic ʿēben. Within the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament,⁴⁰ *ʿēben* is used only by Daniel. It occurs three times in Dan 2.

Dan 2:34-35 (34) "While you were watching, a rock [*ʿēben*] was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. (35) Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock [*ʿabnāʾ*] that struck the statue because a huge mountain and filled the whole earth."

Dan 2:44-45 (44) "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (45) This is the meaning of the rock [*ʿēben*] cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands--a rock⁴¹ that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces."

Treatment of rock symbolism in the Greek Septuagint

The translators of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) were very sensitive to situations where rock terminology was applied to God by an Old Testament poet. Examples of *ʿēben* that are perceived to have literal intent are generally translated *lithos* in the Septuagint and similar passages that contain Hebrew *sēlaʿ* or *šûr* are generally translated *petra*. But in passages where the translators recognized a symbolic reference to God they did not use either *lithos* or *petra* as a rule.⁴² Instead a variety of interpretive paraphrases appear. The word most often substituted--for *šûr* in every case--is *theos* "God."⁴³ Others are: *antilemptōr* "helper,"⁴⁴ *boētheia* "help, support,"⁴⁵ *boēthos* "assistant, auxiliary, ally,"⁴⁶ *dikaïos* "righteous (one),"⁴⁷ *katischuō* "come to one's full strength,"⁴⁸ *krataiōma* "strength,"⁴⁹ *ktistēs* "founder, establisher,"⁵⁰ *kurios* "Lord,"⁵¹ *phulax* "guard, keeper,"⁵² and *stereōma* "support, foundation."⁵³

Rock Symbolism that Makes Reference to Christ in the New Testament

Overview

There are at least forty-six cases in Old Testament poetry where the Hebrew words *ʿēben*, *sēlaʿ*, and *šûr* refer to God in a direct and obvious way.⁵⁴ Of these forty-six cases, representing twenty-eight separate passages,⁵⁵ only three passages (Isa 8:14; 28:16; Ps 118:22) are singled out for comment in the New Testament. In addition there are two seemingly quite ordinary prose passages (Exod 17:6; Num 20:8, 10, 11) to which Paul assigns special messianic significance⁵⁶ and one passage (Dan 2:34-35, 44-45) containing apocalyptic references of a messianic nature. Christ applies the rock symbolism of Dan 2 to Himself in Matt 21:44 and Luke 20:18.⁵⁷ Rock terminology used in the above passages consists of: Isa 8:14 (*ʿēben*, *pinnâ*); 28:16 (*ʿēben* [x2], *pinnâ*, *mûsād* [x2]; Ps 118:22 (*ʿēben*, *rōʿš pinnâ*); Exod 17:6 (*šûr* [x2]); Num 20:8, 10, 11 (*sēlaʿ* [x5]); and Dan 2:34-35, 45 (*ʿēben* [x3]). Thus, only six Old Testament passages representing nineteen individual uses of rock terminology in ten verses are cited by New Testament writers.

There are eight New Testament passages in which the above verses are cited. These are: Matt 21:42-44; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17-18; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:32-33; 1 Cor 10:4; Eph 2:20; and 1 Pet 2:4-8. These eight passages contain twenty-four separate examples of New Testament rock terminology--divided among *lithos* (x13), *petra* (x4), *kephalē gōnias* (x5), and *akrogōniaios* (x2). Fourteen verses are listed in table 1. Note that in Rom 9:33 there are allusions to both Isa 8:14 and Isa 28:16. Also, in 1 Pet 2:4 and 8 there are allusions to both Isa 28:16 and Ps 118:22.

Table 1
New Testament Uses of Old Testament
Rock Symbolism

NT Ref	Greek Word(s)	OT Ref
Matt 21:42	lithon, kephalēn gōnias	Ps 118:22
Matt 21:44	lithon	Dan 2:34-35,45
Mark 12:10	lithon, kephalēn gōnias	Ps 118:22
Luke 20:17	lithon, kephalēn gōnias	Ps 118:22
Luke 20:18	lithon	Dan 2:34-35, 45
Acts 4:11	lithos, kephalēn gōnias	Ps 118:22
Rom 9:32	tō lithō	Isa 8:14
Rom 9:33	lithon, petran	Isa 8:14; 28:16
1 Cor 10:4	petras, hē petra	Exod 17:6; Num 20:8,10-11
Eph 2:20	akrogōniaiou	Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16
1 Pet 2:6	lithon, akrogōniaion	Isa 28:16
1 Pet 2:7	lithos, kephalēn gōnias	Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16
1 Pet 2:8	lithos, petra	Isa 8:14

In table 2 the arrangement of materials is based on which Old Testament verses are cited or alluded to in a given verse.

Table 2
New Testament Uses of Old Testament
Rock Symbolism

OT Ref	Hebrew or Aramaic Word(s)	NT Ref(s)
Poetry		
Ps 118:22	ʔében, rōš pinnâ	Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4, 7
Isa 8:14	ʔében, šûr	Rom 9:32, 33; 1 Pet 2:8
Isa 28:16	ʔében(x2), pinnâ, mûsâd(x2)	Rom 9:33; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:4, 6, 7
Apocalyptic		
Dan 2:34-35,45	ʔében(x3)	Matt 21:44; Luke 20:18
Prose		
Exod 17:6	šûr(x2)	1 Cor 10:4
Num 20:8,10-11	séla ^c (x5)	

The Old Testament examples of rock symbolism that are quoted most often by New Testament writers are not those general references to God which speak of Him as a source of help and protection or security. Instead they are those which speak of a choice to be made in accepting or rejecting Him. Thus, Ps 118:22 ("The stone the builders rejected") is cited by New Testament writers no fewer than six times, Isa 8:14 ("a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall") is cited three times, and Isa 28:16 ("a tested stone . . . the one who trusts will never be dismayed") five times.

An exception to the above generalization is 1 Pet 2:4, which speaks of Christ as "the living Stone." This verse contains allusions to both Ps 118:22 ("rejected by men") and Isa 28:16 ("but chosen by God and precious to him"). But the psalmist does not say the "stone the builders rejected" was to be a "living Stone"; Isaiah does not use the word "living" either. Peter adds this specification, and in doing so he opens for discussion the entire spectrum of Old Testament rock symbolism, in which God is indeed referred to as a living Stone. Consider, for example, such passages as

Ps 18:46(47) The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock [šûrî]! Exalted be God my Savior!

and Isa 26:4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock [šûr] eternal.

By the way in which 1 Pet 2:4 uses its sources, the verse assumes special importance and offers insight into how New Testament writers understood the scriptural mandate for their various uses of rock symbolism generally.

References

The central idea in Isa 8:14 is one of stumbling and falling. In Isa 28:16 key thoughts are the preciousness of the cornerstone, the fact that it serves as a foundation, trust associated with it, and use of the term *akrogōniaios* ("cornerstone"). In Ps 118:22 we find the idea of rejecting and

use of the term *kephalē gōnias* (Hebrew *rōš pinnâ* "cornerstone," NIV "capstone"). The examples from Exod 17 and Num 20 bring together rock symbolism and water symbolism and those from Dan 2 have to do with crushing. New Testament passages which incorporate Old Testament examples of rock symbolism are now quoted according to the passage or passages they reference. Note that some (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:4, 7) occur more than once.

Exod 17:6; Num 20:8, 10-11

They all ate the same spiritual food (4) and drank from the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock [*petras*] which followed them, and that rock [*petra*] was Christ. (1 Cor 10:3-4)

Ps 118:22

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone [*lithon*] the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [*kephalēn gōnias*]; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" (Matt 21:42, NIV margin)

"Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone [*lithon*] the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [*kephalēn gōnias*]; . . ." (Mark 12:10, NIV margin)

Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone [*lithon*] the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [*kephalēn gōnias*]?" (Luke 20:17, NIV margin)

He is "the stone [*lithon*] you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone [*kephalēn gōnias*]." (Acts 4:11, NIV margin)

As you come to him, the living Stone [*lithon*]-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- (1 Pet 2:4)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone [*lithos*] the builders rejected has become the cornerstone [*kephalēn gōnias*]," (1 Pet 2:7, NIV margin)

Isa 8:14

. . . They stumbled over the "stumbling stone [*lithō*]." (33) As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone [*lithon*] that causes men to stumble and a rock [*petran*] that makes them fall, . . ." (Rom 9:32-33)

and, "A stone [*lithos*] that causes men to stumble and a rock [*petra*] that makes them fall." (1 Pet 2:8)

Isa 28:16

. . . and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Rom 9:33)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, (20) built on the foundation [*themeliō*] of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone [*akrogōniaiou*]. (Eph 2:19-20)⁵⁸

As you come to him, the living Stone [*lithon*]-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- (1 Pet 2:4)

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone [*lithon*] in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone [*akrogōniaion*], and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (1 Pet 2:6)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. . . . (1 Pet 2:7)

Dan 2:34-35, 45

He who falls on this stone [*lithon*] will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Matt 21:44)

Everyone who falls on that stone [*lithon*] will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Luke 20:18)

Discussion

Only three fundamentally different motifs are present in the rock symbolism of the New Testament. One has to do with shelter or sustenance, another has to do with building, and the third has to do with crushing. Coincidentally the first category draws on prose, the second on poetry, and the third on apocalyptic.

The shelter/sustenance motif

The only specific example of what I here call the shelter/ sustenance motif is found in 1 Cor 10:3-4, repeated here for the reader's convenience.

They all ate the same spiritual food (4) and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock [*petras*] that accompanied them, and that rock [*petra*] was Christ.

Despite the fact that this is the only place in the New Testament where rock symbolism is applied in this way the passage certainly has parallels. Consider John 4:10 where Christ is speaking to the woman at the well in Samaria: "Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'"

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? (12) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" (13) Jesus answered, "Everyone who

drinks this water will be thirsty again, (14) but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

When the woman ran back to her village to tell others about her newfound Savior she demonstrated what Christ meant by saying that the water He gave would become a "spring of water welling up to eternal life." She had received the living water herself and it immediately began overflowing to others.

Another passage that must be compared with the first is John 7:37-38.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. (38) Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Here, from the seemingly unrelated perspective of water symbolism, is insight into Christ's reasons for establishing the Christian church and the nature of the foundation motif of New Testament rock symbolism--the topic to which we turn in the following section. Paul introduces broad themes when he makes the typological application that he does involving Exod 17:6 and Num 20:8, 10-11.

The cornerstone/foundation
motif: building

The Christian church is a spiritual structure founded on Jesus Christ as its chief cornerstone. But until the cornerstone is used to hold other smaller stones in place, giving stability and direction to the entire building, its purpose has not been realized. To keep a cornerstone in isolation is to reject it. When rejected so large an object does not just go away. Instead people trip over it and it brings about their downfall.⁵⁹ The purpose of the church, however, is not to make people stumble, but to seek out and lay in place other living stones on the foundation of Christ, thus protecting against the possibility of stumbling. This is what we see happening in the story from John 4. The fact that a different metaphor is used should cause no confusion. The living Water is shared with one person and overflows to many. The living Stone (1 Pet 2:4) is set in place so that many smaller stones (1 Pet 2:5) can be set in place on it.

Matt 7:24-25 and Luke 6:48. Direct New Testament references to Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14; 28:16 have been listed above. These should be clear without further comment. Matt 7:24-25 and Luke 6:48 do not refer directly to these passages, but do draw on the same type of imagery.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock [*petran*]. (25) The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock [*petran*]. (26) But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. (27) The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matt 7:24-27)

The Rock in this parable is Christ. Anyone who builds on Him receives sustenance and shelter; if not, his house collapses and he is crushed. Note that no other options are available. Everyone builds on something. Luke 6:46-49 is parallel to Matt 7:24-27.

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? (47) I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. (48) He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock [*petran*]. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. (49) But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." (Luke 6:46-49)

In Matt 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49 the breadth of the reference precludes assigning it exclusively to any one passage. Here, as in 1 Pet 2:4, a full range of Old Testament rock symbolism is in view.

Peter and foundation stone symbolism. In Ps 118:22 the NIV translators render Hebrew *rōš pinnâ* (lit. "head of a corner") as "capstone" rather than "cornerstone." Ps 118:22 is cited six times by New Testament writers (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4, 7), where the corresponding Greek term is *kephalē gōnias*. In 1 Pet 2:4 this term is not used and so the question of how it is translated does not arise, but the remaining five examples are translated "capstone" by NIV, as in Ps 118:22, with "cornerstone" as an alternative reading in the margin. Such symbolism is unique in Scripture. Elsewhere the building motif is always illustrated by a stone on which all others rest. In addition the lexicons state that *pinnâ* means "cornerstone" when it refers to building material.⁶⁰

There is a scriptural precedent for rock symbolism that refers to building stones other than the main foundation piece, but in these cases the reference is not to Christ. In 1 Pet 2:5 those who place their trust in Christ are compared with the type of smaller stone one would normally set in place after a building's foundation has been laid. Here the wise builder of Matt 7 and Luke 6 is multiplied as many times over as there are people willing to accept Christ and build their faith on Him.

you also, like living stones [*lithos*], are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:5)

Comparing believers with "living stones" is reminiscent of both Ps 144:12 and Matt 16:17-18. Ps 144:12 has been cited previously only in a footnote⁶¹ because the term it contains is a relatively minor one—*zāwîṭ* (lit. "corner," then "corner[pillar]," then "pillar," as in NIV).⁶² Ps 144:12 says:

Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars [*zāwiyôṭ*] carved to adorn a palace.⁶³

The other passage called to mind by Peter's words (1 Pet 2:5) is one that describes Peter's own experience, where the figure of a small "rock" (*petros*, Peter) is applied to him personally (Matt 16:18a). In both cases there is a contrast with a larger Stone (1 Pet 2:4) or Rock (Matt 16:18b).

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (18) And I tell you that you are Peter [*petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

In Matt 16:18 Peter, because of his confession of Christ's messiahship and divinity, is called a living stone (*petros*, Peter). This one rock--unstable in itself--is laid in place on immovable bedrock (*petra*), not by any physical means but under the personal direction of the Father, as stated in the preceding verse. Thus, Matt 16:17-18 closely parallels both Matt 7:24-25 and Luke 6:47-48, cited above, and also 1 Pet 2:4-5. All four passages illustrate a pervasive theme that runs through much of rock symbolism in the Old Testament as well as the New, i.e., that God is our Rock and that when we trust in Him we build on a sure foundation. Or in Peter's words,

As you come to him, the living Stone [*lithos*]-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-(5) you also, like living stones [*lithoi*], are being built into a spiritual house . . . (1 Pet 2:4-5)

To interpret the rock symbolism of Matt 16:18 in such a way as to make Peter the foundation of the church⁶⁴ flies in the face of both Peter's understanding of the imagery involved and Christ's own use of it in parallel passages, not to mention the work of other New Testament writers such as Paul. Having referred to Christ as the "chief cornerstone" (*akrogōniaios*) in Eph 2:20 Paul goes on to say that, "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21).

The boulder/millstone
motif: crushing

Texts not listed above as making direct use of Old Testament rock symbolism, but which must be seen in that context, are Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2; and Rev 18:21. In Matt 18, Mark 9, and Luke 17 Christ says it would be preferable to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around one's neck than to cause one of His followers to loose faith. Rev 18:21 says, "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.'" In both cases we have a possible allusion to Dan 2:34-35, 44-45, i.e., a parallel to the metal image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream being struck on its feet and destroyed.

In Matt 21:44 and Luke 20:18 there can be no doubt that Christ applies to Himself the figure of a rock cut out of a mountain without hands. Here there are no secondary allusions. The reference to Dan 2 and the way Nebuchadnezzar's metal image comes to its end is unmistakable and clear. The only question is whether this imagery applies best at the first coming or the second. Christ does not specify when He intended the application to be made. But note what the stone in Dan 2 is said to do. The passage can be applied whenever the specifications it contains are fulfilled. It cannot be applied when those specifications are not fulfilled.

In Dan 2:34-35, 44-45 the great stone falls on the feet of the metal image. The various metals represent kingdoms that would arise in history. Verses 34-35 have been quoted earlier, but are repeated here for convenience.

"While you were watching, a rock [*ʔēben*] was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. (35) Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock [*ʔabnāʔ*] that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth."

Verses 44-45 explain this part of the vision.

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (45) This is the meaning of the vision of the rock [*ʔēben*] cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold into pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."

What the above passage predicts is that the "rock . . . cut out, but not by human hands" (vs. 34), "that struck the statue" (vs. 35), "will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end" (vs. 44). At Christ's first coming no empire was brought to an end. The empire then in power was Rome. By rallying the Jewish nation against Rome Christ could easily have rallied all its people to Himself. But causes of this sort were no part of His ministry. He did not seek a following based on personal popularity nor did He have any hidden political agenda. In fact during the first century A.D. it was not Christ who destroyed Rome, but Rome who destroyed Christ. First century Palestine does not provide a setting for the fulfillment of Dan 2:44 or explain Christ's application of it to Himself.

In establishing the church Christ did set up a spiritual kingdom which "will itself endure forever" (Dan 2:44). So there is a partial fulfillment here. But Dan 2:44 does not say the kingdoms to fall would be spiritual in nature. The one that crucified Him was not. Rome did not secure its victims to crosses with ideas, but with nails. The verse here is talking about four historical empires, of which the fourth was in power when Christ lived. When the Lord returns in power and glory all such powers will fall in a sense just as literal as that by which we understand the crucifixion.

More to the point here is the fact that Christ has always been the mystic Rock spoken of in Scripture. In this sense it is a timeless truth that the rock symbolism of Dan 2--and of the other Old Testament passages considered above--provides a description of Him. The words of Isa 50:7 are just as appropriate in Christ's mouth as those of Isa 50:6 immediately preceding. Verses 6-9 are now quoted. Note the word "flint" in vs. 7.

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (7) Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint [*kaḥḥallāmîš*], and I know I will not be put to shame. (8) He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! (9) It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up."

Our Savior does not start fulfilling the rock symbolism of the Old Testament at the second coming. Indeed, He did not start fulfilling it at the first coming. To be fulfilled at all that symbolism must correspond to a timeless and unchanging Being, and in such a case the question of whether it does not yet apply or when it begins to apply, or whatever, does not arise. If this particular type of symbolism is ever appropriate, it is always appropriate.

Nations must fall for Dan 2:44 to be fulfilled. This verse applies especially to the second advent. And yet, as the author of Hebrews reminds us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). His kingdom and kingship are not to be separated. Neither one has an end, or a beginning.

Conclusion

The consistent teaching of every New Testament writer who deals with the topic of rock symbolism is that the Old Testament figures find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He--in union with the Father--is the One to whom a person can turn for refuge, the One on whom the church is built, and the One with reference to whom an accounting must eventually be given.

¹All Scripture quotations in English are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), unless otherwise noted.

²According to Solomon Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti concordantiae: Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae* (Leipzig, 1896; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Schocken, 1964) there are 259 examples in the Old Testament of forms built on the noun *ʿēben*--singular, dual and plural, with various combinations of prefixes and suffixes. There are 56 examples of *sēlaʿ* and 75 examples of *šûr*. Thus, *sēlaʿ* and *šûr* supply almost exactly half as many examples together (131) as *ʿēben* does alone (259). Other words for "rock" or "stone" occur less frequently than the three mentioned here.

³Objects described by the word *ʿēben* can range in size from gem stones (Exod 25:7) to sling stones (Judg 20:16), to something one would sit on (Exod 17:12), cover a well with (Gen 29:2-3, 8, 10), set up as a memorial pillar (Gen 31:45), or use as foundation courses in a massive building such as Solomon's temple (1 Kg 5:17[31]).

⁴When a person was stoned to death in the Old Testament the objects hurled were *ʾbānîm*. Two verbs are used to describe the act of stoning--*rāgam* (Lev 20:2, 27; 24:23; Num 14:10; 15:35-36; Josh 7:25a) and *sāqal* (Deut 13:10[11]; 17:5; 22:21, 24; Josh 7:25b; 1 Kg 21:13). When David killed Goliath with his sling what he threw was *ʿēben* (1 Sam 17:49).

⁵In Lev 14:40 the stones (*ʾbānîm*.) of which a wall is made are taken outside the town, and in Josh 4:8-9 the Israelites take one large stone (*ʿēben*) for each of the twelve tribes from the bed of the Jordan as they cross (see Deut 27:1-8).

⁶Onyx is the stone of special value that is most often mentioned by name in connection with the generic term *ʿēben*. Thus, we find *ʾabnê-šōham* "onyx stones" in Gen 2:12; Exod 25:7; 28:9; 35:9, 27; 39:6; 1 Chron 29:2. (The word *šōham* occurs alone only in Exod 28:20; 39:13; Job 28:16; and Ezek 28:13.) Sapphire is a precious stone that is mentioned by name (*ʿēben sappîr*, only in Ezek 1:26; 10:1; cf. Job 28:6). Generally, though, the word *sappîr* "sapphire" stands alone (Exod 24:10; 28:18; 39:11; Job 28:16; Cant 5:14; Isa 54:11; Lam 4:7; Ezek 28:13). Another stone (*ʿēben ʿeqdâ*, lit. "stone of brightness") is mentioned in Isa 54:12. NIV translates "sparkling jewels." Elsewhere the more general collective term *ʿēben y^qqārâ* "precious stones" is

used (2 Sam 12:30; 1 Kg 7:9-11; 10:2, 10-11; 1 Chron 20:2; 29:2; 2 Chron 3:6; 9:1, 9-10; 32:27; Ezek 27:22; 28:13; Dan 11:38). 1 Kg 7:10 uses *šbānîm y^qqārôt* to mean "stones of good quality" (NIV) rather than precious stones as such. And the word *y^qqārâ* is used once (Isa 28:16) with *pinna* "corner[stone]." For the symbolic associations of this verse see a later section of this paper. Old Testament references to precious stones (*ēben*) are concentrated in the books of Kings and Chronicles, and in the Pentateuch.

Other words which refer to precious or semi-precious stones in the Hebrew Old Testament, not used in conjunction with *ēben*, include the following. Glosses are taken from Ludwig Koehler & Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), except where noted otherwise: *ōdem* "ruby" (NIV "ruby") (Exod 28:17; 39:10; Ezek 28:13), *bārēqet* "dark green beryl" (NIV "beryl") (Exod 28:17; 39:10; Ezek 28:13 [*bār^eqat*]), *gābîš* "rock crystal" (NIV "jasper") (Job 28:18), *yāh^llōm* "a precious stone" (NIV "emerald") (Exod 28:18; 39:11; Ezek 28:13), *yāš^epe(h)* "nephrite, jade" (NIV "jasper") (Exod 28:20; 39:13 [footnote: "The precise identification of some of these precious stones is uncertain."]; Ezek 28:13), *nōpek* "turquoise(?), malachite(?)" (NIV "turquoise") (Exod 28:18; 39:11; Ezek 27:16; 28:13), *pit^edâ* "chrysolite" (NIV "topaz") (Exod 28:17; 39:10; Job 28:19; Ezek 28:13), *pⁿnîm* "coral" (NIV "rubies") (Job 28:18; Prov 3:15; 8:11; 20:15; 31:10; Lam 4:7), *rā^mmôt* "black coral" (NIV "coral") (Job 28:18), *šāmîr* "emery" (NIV "flint") (Jer 17:1 [NIV "flint"]; Ezek 3:9 [NIV "the hardest stone," Hebrew *k^ššāmîr hāzāq miššōr*, i.e., rock even harder than *šōr* (*šûr*]); Zech 7:12 [NIV "flint"], *taršîš* "a precious stone (kind unknown)" (NIV "chrysolite") (Exod 28:20; 39:13; Song 5:14; Ezek 1:16; 10:9; 28:13; Dan 10:6).

⁷The words *ēben* and *bārād* "hail" are used together in Josh 10:11 (*b^eabnê bārād*) and Isa 30:30 (*w^eēben bārād*).

⁸Num 20:10; Isa 2:21; 7:19; Amos 6:12.

⁹See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 700-1.

¹⁰Exod 20:25; 1 Kg 6:36; 7:12; Isa 9:10; Ezek 40:42.

¹¹1 Kg 7:9, 11.

¹²Lam 3:9.

¹³Amos 5:11.

¹⁴Ps 144:12.

¹⁵Prov 20:17; Lam 3:16.

¹⁶Deut 8:15; Ps 114:8.

¹⁷Deut 32:13.

¹⁸Job 28:9.

¹⁹Isa 50:7.

²⁰Judg 15:8, 11; Isa 2:21; 57:5.

²¹Job 38:6; Isa 28:16; Jer 51:26. The term *rōš pinna* (lit. "head of a corner") is translated "capstone" by NIV, with "cornerstone" in the margin. For discussion see below.

²²Exod 11:5 ("hand mill"); Num 11:8 ("handmill").

²³Isa 47:2; Jer 25:10.

²⁴Deut 24:6.

²⁵Judg 9:53; 2 Sam 11:21. See also Deut 24:6.

²⁶1 Sam 14:4 (x2), 5. "Cliff" is an extended meaning; *šēn* normally means "tooth."

²⁷Job 39:28 (*šēn séla^c*).

²⁸Job 41:24(16).

²⁹Pausal *āben* in Exod 15:5.

³⁰There are five passages which contain *séla*^c, given by Brown, Driver, and Briggs as examples of figurative usage, where I would prefer to speak of illustrations rather than figures (*Lexicon*, p. 701). These are Ps 40:2(3); Isa 33:16; Jer 51:25; and Ezek 26:4, 14. "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock [*séla*^c] and gave me a firm place to stand" (Ps 40:2[3]); "[T]his is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress [*m^esādôt s^elā^cim*]. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him" (Isa 33:16); "I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth," declares the Lord. "I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs [*hass^elā^cim*], and make you a burned-out mountain" (Jer 51:25); "They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock [*sála^c*]" (Ezek 26:4); "I will make you a bare rock [*séla^c*], and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezek 26:14).

³¹See also Job 28:10, where Job describes man's unending quest for the unknown in terms of a quarry: "He tunnels through the rock [*baššûrôt*]; his eyes see all its treasures."

³²For other examples see Josh 5:2; 2 Sam 2:16.

³³The corner in question can be part of, for example, a house (Job 1:19; Prov 21:9 [the "corner of the roof" would be a corner of the house as viewed from the roof]; also 25:24), altar (Exod 27:2; 38:2; Ezek 43:20; 45:19), wall (Jer 31:40 [the "corner of the Horse Gate" would be the corner in the wall adjacent to the Horse Gate]; Neh 3:24, 31-32), or street (Prov 7:8, 12; 2 Chron 28:24).

³⁴The NIV translators render *rōš pinnâ* in Ps 118:22 as "capstone." There is no lexical basis this rendering. According to the lexicons of both Brown-Driver-Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner the meaning is "cornerstone"--in the context of building materials--and in this case "chief cornerstone."

³⁵There are as many as three Old Testament passages where pagan gods are referred to with a word that means "rock." These are: (1) Deut 32:31 ("For their rock [*šûrām*] is not like our Rock [*šûrēnû*], as even our enemies concede"), (2) Deut 32:37-38 ("He will say: 'Now where are their gods, the rock [*šûr*] they took refuge in, the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up to help you! Let them give you shelter!"), and possibly (3) Isa 31:9 ("Their stronghold [*w^esal^cô*] will fall because of terror; at sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic," declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem). In cuneiform texts the difference between the Assyrian "stronghold" as a god and as a geographical area would be  *dingir* Aššur (or *il* Aššur) "(the god) Ashur" as opposed to  *mat* Aššur "(the land of) Ashur, i.e., Assyria (see entry 13 in the sign list of T. Bauer, *Akkadische Lesestücke* [Rome, 1953]). The NIV translators assume Isaiah has in mind the land of Assyria and not the god Ashur.

³⁶See n. 34.

³⁷One further verse deserves comment. In NIV Ps 49:14(15) reads: "Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms [*yišrām*] will decay in the grave far from their principle mansions." The word "rock" [*šûrām*] is a Qere reading; the Kethib is *šîrām* "their distress." The Septuagint, however, translates in a way that implies that the Hebrew word was indeed *šûrām* and that it had a more-than-literal meaning in the opinion of the translators. The English rendering given below is mine.

(48:15, LXX) Like sheep they are laid in Hades,
 death tends them;
 and the upright will rule over them

in the morning,
and their help [*boētheia*] will become useless
in Hades
(apart) from their glory.
(16) But God will ransom my soul
from the hand of Hades,
when He receives me.

The contrast is between the pagans' "help" (*boētheia* [English 49:14, Hebrew 49:15, Greek 48:15]) and the Israelite psalmist's "God" (*theos* [English 49:15, Hebrew 49:16, Greek 48:16]). The term *boētheia* used in this manner implies a Hebrew original that contains the Qere reading *šûrām* "their rock." Note that this figure of speech is related to other rock symbolism in the Old Testament and does not refer to the material from which the pagan deity was made. NIV adopts the conjectural emendation *yīšrām* "their forms."

³⁸Hebrew *kî lō' k'šûrēnû šûrām*, lit. "for not like our Rock [is] their rock." This makes odd English but beautiful Hebrew.

³⁹Ps 18 is a repetition of 2 Sam 22. The two chapters are virtually identical throughout.

⁴⁰Biblical Aramaic is primarily represented by Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 and Dan 2:4b-7:28. Jer 10:11 offers an isolated Aramaic sentence in an otherwise Hebrew narrative. And because Gen 31:47 contains the Aramaic expression "Jegar Sahadutha" (*y^ggar śāh^hdūtā[?]*) corresponding to Hebrew "Galeed" (*gal^{ēd}*) "heap (*gal*, *y^ggar*) of witness (*ēd*, *śāh^hdūtā[?]*)," or "witness heap," it is also included. See Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Porta Linguarum Orientalium (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), p. 5.

⁴¹The English word "rock" occurs two times in NIV, but the Aramaic word *ēben* occurs only once.

⁴²Exceptions are found in Isa 8:14 and Isa 28:16. Isa 8:14 contains both *ēben* (Greek *lithos*) and *šûr* (Greek *petra*). The passage surrounding Dan 2:34-35 and 44-45 (*ēben*, *lithos*) is apocalyptic in nature. See also Zech 3:9 (*ēben*, *lithos*).

⁴³Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31 (x2), 37; Isa 26:4; 30:29; 44:8; Ps 18:31(32) (LXX 17:32); 62:2(3) (LXX 61:3); 62:6(7) (LXX 61:7); 71:3 (LXX 70:3); 92:15(16) (LXX 91:16); 95:1 (LXX 94:1); 144:1 (LXX 143:1).

⁴⁴Ps 42:9(10) (LXX 41:10); 89:26(27) (LXX 88:27).

⁴⁵Ps 49:14(15) (LXX 48:15); Ps 62:7(8) (LXX 61:8); 89:43(44) (LXX 88:44).

⁴⁶Ps 19:14(15) (LXX 18:15); 78:35 (LXX 77:35); 94:22 (LXX 93:22).

⁴⁷1 Sam 2:2.

⁴⁸Gen 49:24. The gloss cited is intransitive; more commonly *katischuō* has the transitive meaning "overpower." But *ho katischusas* Israel does not mean "the One who overpowers Israel," it means "the One who brings Israel to full strength." Context demands a causative meaning in this particular passage.

⁴⁹Ps 31:3(4) (LXX 30:4). The form *krataiōma* "strength" can be derived from *krataiōō* "strengthen" in the same way that *dikaiōma* "ordinance" is derived from *dikaiōō* "deem right, do one justice." The noun in both cases describes the result that follows to a person from someone else's performance of the corresponding verbal idea.

⁵⁰2 Sam 22:32.

⁵¹Isa 17:10.

⁵²2 Sam 22:47 (x2); 23:3.

⁵³Ps 18:2 (LXX 17:3) (*stereōma* translates *śēla^c*, *boēthos* translates *šûr*); 71:3 (LXX 71:3).

⁵⁴Gen 49:24; Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:2, 3, 32, 47, 47; 23:3; Ps 18:2(3), 2(3), 31(32), 46(47); 19:14(15); 28:1; 31:2(3), 3(4); 42:9(10); 49:14(15); 61:2(3); 62:2(3), 6(7), 7(8); 71:3, 3; 73:26; 27:35; 89:26(27); 92:15(16); 94:22; 95:1; 118:22; 144:1; Isa 8:14, 14; 17:10; 26:4; 28:16, 16; 30:29; 44:8; Hab 1:12.

⁵⁵Gen 49; Deut 32; 1 Sam 2; 2 Sam 22, 23; Ps 18, 19, 28, 31, 42, 49, 62, 71, 73, 78, 89, 92, 94, 95, 118, 144; Isa 8, 17, 26, 28, 30, 44; Hab 1.

⁵⁶1 Cor 10:4.

⁵⁷Matt 21:44 is not present in some ancient manuscripts.

⁵⁸Despite the fact that only one word is borrowed from Isa 28:16 the reference to that verse is unequivocal. According to James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963; originally published, 1914-15), the word *akrogōniaios* "may very well have been coined by the LXX (Isa 28[:]16). The Attic word was *gōniaios*: see inscriptional citations in J. A. Robinson *Ephesians*, p. 164. Crönert (p. 233) has several other compounds of *akros*, some of which may be in the same category" (p. 19). Thus, to find the term *akrogōniaios* in the New Testament is to find a sure allusion to Isa 28:16. Apart from the matter of how the word originated, what it means is described as follows in the same paragraph: "W. W. Lloyd in *CR* iii. p. 419a (1889) among some architectural notes on Eph 2[:]20-22, says: 'The *acrogōniaios* here is the primary foundation-stone at the angle of the structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout'" (p. 19).

⁵⁹The mistake of rejecting the Cornerstone is found in Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; and 1 Pet 2:4, 7. The idea of stumbling over it is found in Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:8. These references are quoted above.

⁶⁰See the standard reference works of Brown-Driver-Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner.

⁶¹See n. 14, above.

⁶²Elsewhere the word *zāwīt* (plural *zāwīyôt*) occurs only in Zech 9:15 with reference to the corners of the altar.

⁶³Note that this psalm begins with the words, "Praise be to the Lord, my Rock, . . ." (vs. 1). Rock imagery was in the mind of the writer when he wrote vs. 12, just as when he wrote vs. 1.

⁶⁴According to A. J. Maas, S. J., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1928; first published 1898), pp. 181-83, a number of positions have been taken by Catholics on the question of identifying the Rock figure in Matt 16:18. Different Catholic writers have held that the Rock is: (a) Christ, (b) Peter's confession of Christ, (c) Peter, (d) the apostles (Rev 21:14), (e) the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), and (f) the entire body of the faithful. On the other hand, ". . . among the learned Protestants of more recent times Bengel, Kuinoel, Rosenmüller, Dodwell, Michaelis, Parkhurst, Fritzsche, Bloomfield, Alford, Mansel, Holtzmann, Weiss, Meyer regard the rock of the Church as identical with the person of Peter" (ibid., p. 183). For a sampling of pre-Reformation Catholic sources see *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers by S. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: St. Matthew, part 2, 2nd ed. (Oxford and London: John Henry and James Parker et al., 1864), pp. 584-86.