

## SESSION 4

# I AM A PRIEST

### ▶ ***The Point***

As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.

### ▶ ***The Passage***

1 Peter 2:4-10

### ▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

You can't just enter the White House today. You have to have an appointment, and your name has to be cleared by security. While Abraham Lincoln was in office, however, people simply went into the White House each day, hoping for an audience with the President. They just waited in line with everybody else—and hoped. This routine allowed for one exception. Lincoln's youngest son, Thomas ("Tad"), was famous for his undisciplined "run of the house," even interrupting cabinet meetings on occasion. Lincoln adored his son, so Tad always had direct access to his father.

Most of us will never have direct access to the President of the United States. But as followers of Christ, we have direct access to the God of the universe. At one time in biblical history, only certain people had special access to God; they were called priests. Even today, when we hear that word "priest," a specific image of what a priest looks like comes to mind. But as we'll see in 1 Peter 2, Peter called all believers priests. Let's explore what exactly that means.

### ▶ ***The Setting***

The apostle Peter wrote the epistle of 1 Peter to Christians in Asia Minor (see 1 Pet. 1:1-2), perhaps in A.D. 60-61. We know ancient Asia Minor as modern Turkey. Believers in this region were following in Jesus' steps by enduring suffering. (See 2:21.) Though their status was low in this world, Peter knew they were a "royal priesthood" (v. 9) with the great privilege and responsibility of devoting their lives to God and declaring His greatness.

# What does the Bible say?

**Living stone** (v. 4)—This metaphor applied to Jesus based on His resurrection (i.e., He is “living”) and Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah as a “stone.” (See Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6.)

**Cornerstone** (v. 6)—The most important stone in the foundation of a temple or other structure. It determines the placement of all other stones included in the building.

## **1 Peter 2:4-10**

**<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—**

**<sup>5</sup> you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

**<sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.”**

**<sup>7</sup> So honor will come to you who believe; but for the unbelieving, “The stone that the builders rejected—this one has become the cornerstone,”**

**<sup>8</sup> and “A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over.” They stumble because they disobey the word; they were destined for this.**

**<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

**<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**





## 1 Peter 2:4-5 Commentary

**[Verse 4]** The idea that all believers in Christ are priests is a wonderful distinctive of biblical Christianity. We have entered this priesthood as we have **come to him**, that is, to Jesus. Figuratively speaking, Jesus is **a living stone**. He is “living” because He is risen from the dead. He is a “stone” in the sense of the foundation for believers’ salvation and for the spiritual household in which His people serve as priests. We who believe in Him have “come to him” and devoted ourselves to Him by faith. We continue to come to Him daily by faith as we “grow up” into our salvation. (See 1 Pet. 2:2.)

Of course, not all people come to Christ. He is also **rejected by people**. (See Matt. 26:14-15; 27:1-2,26; Luke 4:16-30.) Today, many people still reject the Christ of the Bible. **But** God’s judgment matters more than the judgment of people, and Jesus is **chosen and honored by God**. He was chosen in eternity past to be the Savior who would offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sinners. (See 1 Pet. 1:18-20; John 17:24.) God has honored Him by raising Him from the dead, exalting Him to the heavenly throne, and giving to Him the name above every name. (See Acts 2:32-33; Phil. 2:9.) Though people may choose to reject Jesus, God has chosen Him for honor.

**[Verse 5]** Jesus now lives to offer His life to others; if we have come to Him, then we also are **living stones**. As living stones, we relate to Christ and other believers to form **a spiritual house**. Jesus said He would “build” His church. (See Matt. 16:18.) He referred to His own body as a “temple” (John 2:19-22). Paul wrote of believers being included in and growing into “a holy temple” and said that we are “being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22).

In addition to being stones in the house, we are to function as **a holy priesthood**. Old Testament priests functioned before God in the temple’s holy and most holy places. (See Lev. 16; 2 Chron. 3:8-10.) Peter meant that as believers we ourselves are set apart and “holy” through Christ. We have the privilege of coming into God’s presence. We are qualified **to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God**. We offer such sacrifices **through Jesus Christ** who gives us access to God.

What did Peter have in mind when he used the phrase “spiritual sacrifices”? Hebrews 13:15 encourages believers in Jesus to “offer up to God a sacrifice of praise.” Hebrews 13:16 calls doing good and sharing with others “sacrifices” that please God. Paul urged believers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). Paul also referred to a financial gift as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). Jesus taught that God desires mercy toward others over literal sacrifices. (See Matt. 9:13; 12:7.) From these passages, we can conclude that we offer “spiritual sacrifices” when we praise and worship God, humble ourselves in confession and repentance, act in consecrated obedience, do good deeds, and share our resources with others.



## 1 Peter 2:6-8 Commentary

**[Verse 6]** Peter first cited Isaiah 28:16. God Himself said, **I lay a stone in Zion.** The stone God laid is a **chosen and honored cornerstone.** Peter referred to Jesus in verse 4 as a “living stone . . . chosen and honored by God.” In the ancient world, the greatest care was taken in selecting, preparing, and setting in perfect position the primary foundation stone of a temple building. Such stones could be massive. All other stones were properly fixed in relation to the cornerstone. Peter’s point was that God laid Jesus Christ Himself as the center and foundation of His kingdom. Every person who is in the kingdom is built upon and in relation to Him.

As the cornerstone, Christ is fully reliable. **The one who believes in him will never be put to shame.** We have God’s own guarantee that we who rely on His mercy in Christ for salvation will never be put to shame. God has proven His commitment to us in the death of Christ. He has proven His power in the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the rock of our salvation. God will keep His commitments to us in Christ during this life, in final judgment, and for all eternity.

**[Verses 7-8]** In fact, **honor will come to you who believe.** Peter’s first readers were experiencing various trials and suffering (see 1 Pet. 1:6; 3:14; 4:12-19)—dishonor was coming to them from the world. The time would come, however, for them to receive honor with Christ as His faithful servants. (See 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 22:5.) On the other hand, the end for **the unbelieving** will be dramatically different. They are headed toward spiritual destruction.

Psalm 118:22 referred to **the stone that the builders rejected.** The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had responsibility as builders of God’s kingdom, but they rejected Jesus. Their rejection, however, was not the final word. God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him. In so doing, God confirmed that **this one has become the cornerstone.** The truth is that all unbelievers are building their lives and personal kingdoms while rejecting the most important stone of all. Again, their judgment regarding Christ’s value is not the final word. God has declared Jesus the cornerstone of His kingdom.

Peter used Isaiah 8:14 to show that for unbelievers, Christ is **a stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over.** Those who **disobey the word** of the gospel are stumbling headlong into judgment and eternal punishment. (See 2 Pet. 3:1-9.) This destruction is not a surprise, since **they were destined** for this. Some interpreters think Peter meant the consequence of disobedience was destined—that disobedience results in stumbling. Other interpreters think “they were destined” means those who disobey were themselves destined to disobey.

Would this interpretation deny people’s personal responsibility to make a real choice for Christ? No. Scripture teaches both that God sovereignly works out His will even through human disobedience and that people are truly responsible for their choices. (See Acts 2:23; 13:46-48.) If Peter did mean the unbeliever’s disobedience was in God’s plan, he was not suggesting unbelievers are less than responsible moral agents.







## 1 Peter 2:9-10 Commentary

**[Verse 9]** The rich terminology and images of the Old Testament continued to guide Peter as he described our priestly position and responsibilities. Peter especially drew from Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; and Isaiah 43:20-21. Through Christ, we are **a chosen race**. God chose Abraham and his descendants. He has chosen us as well. (See 1 Pet. 1:1; Eph. 1:4.) We are **a royal priesthood**. We are a “royal” priesthood because we serve the King of an eternal kingdom. When God was about to give the Ten Commandments, He signaled His intent for all His people to be priests before Him: “Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6).

Of course, Israel did not keep the covenant, but God was determined to fulfill His purpose of having a people who would serve Him as priests. Under the new covenant believers are **a holy nation, a people for his possession**; God has given us His Spirit so we can fulfill His will in serving Him as priests. God’s will is that we **may proclaim the praises** of which He is worthy. Some translations have “the excellencies.” God’s excellencies and worthiness of praise are seen in that He **called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. God has brought us as Christians out of darkness into “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:13). In that way, we have seen His excellencies and we can declare His praises. We are called and commissioned as priests to proclaim our great God to the world. We are His witnesses. We are also called to proclaim Him to one another as His worshipers.

**[Verse 10]** God has dramatically changed our status and experience through Christ. When we were unbelievers, we were **not a people** in the sense of having a recognized and right standing in God’s sight. Through Christ we have become **God’s people**. God has committed Himself to us. We have committed ourselves to Him. Though all the people of the world belong to Him and are accountable to Him (see Ex. 19:6; Ps. 24:1; Acts 17:28-29), we are God’s people in a special and wonderful way. Likewise, there was a time when we **had not received mercy**. We deserved judgment for our sin. Apart from Christ, judgment and punishment are exactly what we would have had. Through Christ we **have received mercy** because He bore our sin in our place. (See 1 Pet. 2:24.) We have so much to proclaim! We are authorized as God’s priests to proclaim God and His saving work to one another and to the world.

Read the article “Christ’s Followers: A First-Century Understanding” in the Winter 2017-2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.



Two previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, “Peter’s Epistles: An Overview” (Fall 2016) and “Building Stones and Stone Buildings” (Spring 2011), relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator).

