

## The Plumb Line

The world of construction is often used metaphorically to express various spiritual points in The Bible. To build a structure properly it is often necessary to establish a point of reference. For example a plumb line, which is a string with a weight attached to the end, is used to establish a true vertical line to prove that a structure is standing upright. The figure of the plumb line is employed here to express that the nation of Israel did not conform to Gods standards.

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand.

And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."<sup>1</sup>

When constructing a wall or building of brick or stone the procedure is often followed to first lay a cornerstone and use that as your point of reference to line up the rest of the structure. Isaiah uses this figure here.

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place."<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament the apostle Peter picks up the metaphor and applies it to faith in the Gospel.

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for."<sup>3</sup>

The building is the whole body of believers and the element that makes them a part of the structure is faith in Jesus Christ. In his letter to the church at Ephesus the apostle Paul identifies Christ as the cornerstone.

For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ is the point of reference for evaluating the faith of the believer. Any set of beliefs can also be judged by this same standard. This is Gods standard. That is what is being communicated by the metaphors of the plumb line and the cornerstone. We'll close with some excerpts from the letter to the Hebrews. These verses talk about the supremacy of Christ and the necessity of paying careful attention to his Gospel (with two more construction metaphors thrown in for good measure).

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 7:7-8

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 28:16-17

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:6-8

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:18-22

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 1:1-2,10-12,2:1-3,3:1-4