

UPON ROCK

who do you say that I am?

This

you are the messiah, the son of the living God.

In my earliest days of spiritual instruction there was one particular lesson taught by Yeshua that stood out for me. My earliest recollections of attending Sunday School focused on this lesson. It was the parable of the man who built his house on the rock versus the man who built his house on sand. I don't know why this lesson stuck with me, but it stood out because the imagery was clear and understandable. I don't think I am unique in remembering this parable. Virtually everyone in the faith knows and can recite the basics of this parable. However, even with that, very few of us know that this parable is the conclusion to the most extensive teaching given by Yeshua on the Mount of Beatitudes to a great multitude of people. He summed up an extensive teaching with this simple parable. Based on the teaching and the concluding parable, the multitude offered this perspective.

The result was that when Yeshua had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Matthew 7:28-29

What is the content of His teaching and how does this simple parable distinguish Him from other teachers of His day? Scribes were the educated people of that day; they could read and write. They were the men who copied the Torah and other Scriptures. They were the experts on what the Scriptures said. They

taught the commandments of the LORD. But what could Yeshua possibly say that was so different from them? How could a parable about a house built on a rock versus one built on sand cause the people to say, "He speaks 'as one having authority' and is different from the scribes?"

Yeshua's teaching of the Beatitudes begins in Matthew chapter five and extends through chapter seven. It begins with these famous words.

*He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." **Matthew 5:2-12***

There have been many moving speeches made at differing times by many throughout history, but few have spoken of the deep things of the soul, actually instructing the soul how to live. Yeshua's words stand as powerful to men's souls as does the Ten Commandments spoken on Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments invoke fear and awe of God, but Yeshua's words wash the soul with the Father's compassion. With these powerful words of comfort, He then shifts to the subject of the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. He emphatically says that they are not to consider what He just said as a replacement or substitute for the Law of Moses and the writings of the Prophets. Instead, He says that His teaching is the same teaching as the Law and Prophets and further warns that anyone who annuls the least of the commandments in the Law, using His teachings, shall be least in the kingdom to come.

*Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:19***

The teaching of the Law is also the teaching of the scribes, but Yeshua suggests that our righteousness must be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees. This is a very direct reference to the scribes, suggesting that while they teach the Torah, their righteousness is clearly lacking.

*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:20***

The contrast here is profound. On the one hand Yeshua spoke some of the most compassionate words ever expressed, and on the other hand He said that the established religious teachers of His day were lacking in this understanding.

Today, the same profound comparison can be made. Whereas the scribes and Pharisees stressed the "letter of the Law" without the Spirit; today, some pastors stress the spirit of things while ignoring the "sword of the Spirit," which is the Law, and some Messianic rabbis continue to put the emphasis on the "letter of the Law" without the Spirit. Obviously, a balance is needed and that is what Yeshua began to speak to—balancing the commandments correctly, thus making the instructions of God to be viable instructions for daily living. To do that, He addressed several specific commandments that had been taught by the scribes, offering His word in contrast.

The first commandments Yeshua addressed dealt with conflicts between brothers, ranging from murder to legal disputes. There is nothing so compelling as being in dispute with others. Not only is it stressful, it also commands your full attention until the matter is resolved. The passions of men are greatest in a brotherly conflict. A brotherly conflict can propel you from an "arm in arm" status with each other to being "at arms" against him. That is when the commandments and compassion of the LORD is needed most in our faith.

Yeshua talked about not committing adultery and divorce. Nothing is more damaging in a home than for a husband and wife to break their marriage covenant. Breaking a marriage covenant rips the very fabric of their souls, and the damage carries on to future generations through their children. The trauma to a marriage due to adultery can seem like the end of the world, as trust is destroyed and family members are affected.

Yeshua spoke about false vows and declarations, words spoken beyond a simple *yes* or *no*. A man's word is more valuable than gold. Some men don't believe that, but Yeshua taught it. As a community, we only have our word, and when we break our word or make vows and

don't keep them, we destroy ourselves. Yeshua warned against staking your reputation on what you say. He instructed that many statements are made as simple agreements, subject to many things. He warned against swearing or making oaths regardless of the conditions that may be endured to fulfill them. The tongue—the words people speak—gets them into more trouble than anything else they normally do. Yeshua spoke to the wisdom of saying less.

Finally, He talked about basic fairness between men, “eye for eye,” comparing it to the service of God.

The Law seeks equity for payment of damages done, but Yeshua spoke of our relationship with the Father as His servants, where equity of men is not the standard. As a servant, there is no equity as with a free man; all justice is found in the Master of the servant. In particular, servants of God, or bondservants, serve from the motivation of the heart for the reason of love, or to simply do that which is right (righteousness). The Law also teaches that servants have a different standard for restitution since their justice comes through their Master, not from other men.

As servants of God, we are instructed not to seek our own justice from other men. Instead, we are to offer the other cheek, go the extra mile, or offer our shirt as well since our Master provides for our needs. We do all of these things to show that we are servants of God.

Yeshua taught about “loving your neighbor” and giving financial gifts. “Love your neighbor” is the second greatest commandment of the Law. All of the commandments concerning other men can be summed up in this one commandment. The gift of your resources (your life) is the greatest way to express your love of your neighbor. When your neighbor's need is satisfied by your gift, there is no greater way to express your love or fulfill the commandment.

Then He talked about prayer and praying to our Heavenly Father. He even offered a model prayer to us. The *LORD's Prayer* that Yeshua taught is more than a liturgical expression. First, God already knows our hearts and our needs. Prayer, as taught by the Messiah, is more about us learning to recognize the Father and His kingdom in the midst of our needs. Praying for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance is the mainmast in the ship of life. But Yeshua has connected the dots and shown us that there is a direct correlation in how we forgive and then are forgiven.

From there He spoke of fasting before God and not behaving like a hypocrite. Fasting is a religious activity like an emergency vehicle with lights and sirens. Anyone who sees you are fasting immediately yields to your activity at mealtimes. When lights and sirens are seen on the street, you immediately pull over and make way for them to pass unhindered. Yeshua instructed us to turn off the lights and sirens when fasting before others. He spoke of true sincerity before God as something done humbly that only God knows.

With all of that, Yeshua then hit them in the pocket book and talked about the pursuit of money and career. He spoke to our needs for basic necessities of life and wants for abundance and adornment, concluding that we should seek first for the kingdom and all these things would be added later. If a man will just be faithful and consistent in his labor, there will be a harvest and an accumulation, just like the birds and flowers.

Yeshua then talked about how we judge one another, warning us that we will be judged by the same measure that we judge. He even addressed those who feel compelled to correct others, a product of judging others. He then spoke of God's willingness to give to us what we ask of Him. He then summarized the Law by saying that the Law commands us to treat

others in the manner we want to be treated.

At this point Yeshua shifted gears and spoke of other teachers, teachers who would take issue with the teaching He just gave. Let's examine that a bit more closely.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

There have been many "good" teachers before, but Yeshua's teaching is different. The difference is that Yeshua compares Himself to a narrow gate whereas everyone else uses a wide gate. Have you heard other more liberal minded teachers say that everyone is really praying and believing in the same God? Whether it be Allah, Jehovah, Buddha, or whatever, everyone is believing in the same God. Have you ever heard believers say that one good teaching is as good as another? Or, have you heard them say there are no more clean and unclean, holy and profane determinations? According to Yeshua, His way is narrow and the "opened minded" person will not choose His way. Instead, they will choose the wide way to destruction. Anyone who is playing at righteousness and just being religious will not like what Yeshua said here. Instead, these words will be received as offensive. Shouldn't the way be wide and open so EVERY one can go in?

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut

down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:15-20

Obviously, the proof is in the pudding! The logic here is straightforward. For those of us in the modern Messianic movement, and those who have been learning Hebrew Roots, let us apply what Yeshua just taught, because this principle has to do with validating a correct teaching or a person's religious endeavor. This is easily understood.

What does it mean to practice *lawlessness*? To be lawless is to be Torah-less. Sin is the transgression of the Law, so breaking the Law by denying the Law completely (or partially) falls into the definition of being lawless. Do you remember Yeshua saying that His gate was small and narrow? It seems that His warning of that gate and those calling Him "LORD, LORD" but not entering the kingdom share the same results. Maybe that is why He expressed them together here.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Matthew 7:21-23

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man who built his house

on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.
Matthew 7:24-27

For all good Bible students, the word “Therefore” stands out strong. All that has been said before was to set the stage for what follows. Before we address the “therefore” conclusion, let us quickly review what He said. It is the reason for the parable.

Yeshua spoke of blessings and compassion. He spoke of God’s Torah, the Law, and God’s commandments. He spoke of conflicts between brethren, about conflict in marriage leading to divorce, about how we overstate things to one another and don’t fulfill what we say. He talked about fairness and equity among men but then contrasted that to being a servant where fairness does not prevail. A servant gets his justice from His master, not from other men. He reviewed the commandment to “love your neighbor” and talked about prayer and fasting to God. He discussed the goal of most men – the pursuit of money and happiness. He then gave us a model for identifying false teachers. In conclusion, He described the ways of God as a narrow gate, whereas the way to destruction is through a wide-open gate. He finally gave a warning to those who would call Him “Lord, Lord” but did not keep His Law. The stage is now set for the parable: a man has a choice of where to build his house, on a rock or on sand. This is the teaching that amazed the multitude and the reason why they said of Him, “He speaks as one who has authority.”

It is true that Yeshua’s teaching is an amazing balance between justice and mercy. It is balanced between the commandments of God and the compassion of God. He has instructed us to bring all aspects of our lives into concert with the instructions of God. This includes all of our relationships, both in and out of the home. He wants everything to have its place but not to

take precedence over Him. Further, He wants all of His instruction and spiritual training not to be turned aside by hypocrites and religious men who have an agenda for themselves. It is brilliant and amazing, but how is this so different from the scribes to justify that He speaks differently from the scribes “as one having authority?”

The word picture which concludes His teaching is simple. Each man lives his life, building a house as he lives his life. What do we base our lives upon? Is it the Messiah (the Rock) or the multiple teachings and interpretations of many different men and our own selfish ambitions (the multiple grains of sand)? You can take this word picture and draw several applications from the type of foundation (rock or sand) to size and stability of the structure. Just as life has its various phases, so building a house has its phases. Every person makes these kinds of decisions for their life. For most, key value decisions are made early on, just like the foundation of a house.

Here in Oklahoma, the clay soil plays havoc on many homes due to the abundance or lack of ground moisture. Clay swells with the moisture and contracts without it. Can you imagine sand that washes completely out with moisture, leaving parts of the house with nothing under it? The foundation of life is just as important.

Listening, learning, and applying the teaching of Yeshua to one’s life is like planning and building one’s house on the Rock. Not acting on the words of Yeshua is like going your own way, ignoring the foundation material and awaiting a disaster. Living one’s life to yourself, going any which way you want, and simply doing what is convenient does not bode well for the tests of the future. When those tests come, what will remain?

Yeshua said that if we follow His instructions then we will remain, namely, our foundation

will be unmoved. The man who does not follow His instructions will suffer a great loss and his fall will be great.

The parable is complete, but what has Yeshua said that stands out as with “one with authority?” It doesn’t appear in these instructions or the parable alone. There must be more to this that we are not considering.

Consider this: There are only two elements to the parable – the rock and the house. The people have heard previous instructions of the scribes (they are making a comparison to them). This is why He says, “You have heard it said.” What have the scribes already taught about the rock and the house that is being compared by Yeshua’s teaching?

The teaching of the scribes included the Torah, the Prophets, and the other writings such as Psalms. There are many instances where the Scripture speaks of the *rock* before. The *rock* has a very specific connotation in the Scriptures. Yeshua seems to be building upon that previous teaching. Remember the *rock* that provided the life-giving waters in the wilderness with Moses? The story of Moses, his staff, and the rock are central to the very definition of belief in God. In fact, the “Rock of Salvation” is a dominant theme in Scripture. Consider these verses.

The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.
Deuteronomy 32:4

King David sang these words in a song recorded by Samuel and as a psalm:

He said, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my

savior, You save me from violence.”
2 Samuel 22:2-3

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. **Psalm 18:2**

David repeats this theme in other psalms:

For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.
Psalm 27:5

He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken. **Psalm 62:2**

Yeshua knew these themes, understood them, and made reference to them, but unlike the scribes who taught them as well, Yeshua made them come alive for the multitude. Yeshua spoke to the real issues of life, daily living, how we get along with one another, and how we live. He drew a clear comparison to building a house (living a life) on a sure foundation—a foundation of Yeshua.

This explains the amazement of the multitude, but where is the “one with authority” part?

Again, we need to remember the teaching of the scribes. What is the first teaching of a scribe in the Torah? Remember, the scribes write the Torah scrolls. What letter does the Torah begin with? Is it Aleph, the first letter of the Aleph-Bet of Hebrew? No, it is the second letter *Bet*. What do the scribes say about the letter *Bet* being used first in the Torah?

The answer is in the meaning of the letter *Bet*. The letter *Bet* means *house*. The scribes teach that the Torah is the story of how God wants to build His house. The stories of the fathers, the children of Israel, the promised land, and

the Messiah is all about building the House of God (Bet).

Back to our parable. Yeshua is teaching how to build that house, the third Temple that is us. God's house, like ours, must be built on a sure foundation. That foundation must be truth and not falsehood. It must be the very purpose of the Messiah Himself. In fact, it must be built by God Himself. Maybe you have heard this verse before.

*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; **Psalm 127:1***

Apparently, Yeshua compared His teaching enough with the scribes that the people made the necessary comparison. Later, Yeshua clearly and precisely stated to His disciples how He would build the House of God. It came when Yeshua asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" You may remember that Peter, coincidentally whose Hebrew name "Kefa" meant *rock*, answered that He was the "Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Yeshua answered Peter this way.

*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock [upon this confession] I will build My church [House]; and the gates of Hades [Hell] will not overpower it. **Matthew 16:18***

The emphasis here is not on Peter; the emphasis is on where the House is to be built—on the rock. Yeshua the Messiah is the Rock, He is the foundation of the House. He is the One who we should build our houses (lives) upon. If we do, then we will not be moved or shaken. If we don't, we will suffer a great fall. If there was any question about Yeshua speaking as "one with authority," this last statement should remove all of those doubts. Yeshua is defying the enemies of God to defeat the House He builds. No scribe ever spoke with this understanding or authority.

It is a simple parable, but it is more than a word of exhortation to us on how to live. It is how the House of God is being built today. To be part of that House, you must follow the instructions of the Master Builder (the Messiah) of the House.

who do you say that i am?

HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.