PAUL’S USE OF METAPHORS

Ezekiel and Jeremiah: A Comparison

Living Stones
T
HE FIRST CAMERA I remember using was a Kodak Brownie. It was essentially a plastic box with a film-turn knob on the side and a white button made into the front corner of the camera. It was designed so you held the camera at your waist and looked down into the viewfinder. It had a single-use flash bulb, which was hot as blazes if you took it out too soon.

Imagine my excitement when my parents got a Kodak Instamatic 104 camera! The smaller size meant it could fit into the car’s glove box. Putting on the flashcube was a snap. The camera went with us on family visits and vacations. Suddenly we had a marked increase in the number of pictures in the family photo album.

Next we got a Polaroid. The camera would spit out the developing photo. After waiting a minute (literally!), we could peel off the frame and look at the photo. No more going to the drug store to get the film developed. This changed everything!

I went off to college with a pocket instamatic that used size 110 film. It was easy to use and took pretty good pictures.

Since then, I have owned and used 35mm SLRs and now digital cameras. And who would have ever thought a phone (!) could take such excellent pictures? Now everybody gets a picture of everything! Where did we go on vacation? I have a picture. How deep was the snow? I have a picture. The neighbors have a new baby. My nephew got a new car. The fall colors are gorgeous! Volunteers painted the fellowship hall. Picture. Picture. Picture. Picture.

What caused me to think about cameras? I recently read about John Beasley Greene (1832-1856), who traveled and photographed Egypt. Greene, an impressive scholar, studied with the French Egyptologist Emmanuel de Rouge and French photographer Gustave Le Gray. Combining his interests, Greene was the first archaeologist to use photography as a significant part of his excavation work. In 1855, he excavated the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet-Habu, Egypt, and kept a photographic record of his work. Tragically, he died of tuberculosis at age 24 in Egypt. His work, though, forever changed archaeology.

As you read this issue, really look at the photographs. Ask yourself, “What am I learning from this image?” and “How does this enhance my Bible study?” I think you are going to be amazed at what you see in—and learn from—these photos.

Say “Cheese!”
FOR SOME TIME I HAVE anticipated a work that would make relatively complex Christian theological terms and concepts accessible to undergraduate and graduate theological students, local church ministers, and laypersons interested in expanding their understanding of seminal concepts of Christian theological reflection. Gregg Allison has achieved this goal in his *Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Designed with the contemporary evangelical reader in mind, this work fulfills the author’s intent to address people who seek a concise understanding of the most significant words at the heart of the Christian faith.

Both a strength and weakness of the work is Allison’s commitment to confine each entry to approximately one hundred words. The strength lies in the concentrated high content of each article; the weakness lies in the implication that all the included terms are of relatively equal significance. In addition, the repetitive use of the phrase “With respect to…” at the beginning of many articles tends to be distracting. One wonders if the space could have been more effectively used for content. Perhaps a symbol key the interested reader could consult would be more useful and economical in terms of space.

Despite the above mentioned stylistic limitations, it is easy to envision *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* being kept close at hand by anyone interested in a readily accessible reference to assist in clarifying the technical theological language found in other, more complex reading. It is not difficult for this writer to imagine how useful such a work would have been in his own student days. With this in mind, it is easy to enthusiastically recommend Gregg Allison’s work. He is to be commended for providing an excellent resource to help the reader bridge the gap between ordinary language and the relatively specialized language of Christian theological reflection. The multi-lingual guide in the appendix only further enhances the usefulness of the work in cross-cultural contexts.  

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Book reviews are limited to those the Illustrator staff feels confident to recommend, based on ease of reading, quality of content, and doctrinal viewpoint. Each book is reviewed within LifeWay’s doctrinal guidelines. The 1 to 10 scale reflects overall quality and usefulness.
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Living STONES

WHAT DID PETER MEAN?

ETB: 1 Peter 2:4-10
When we think of an ancient temple, the temple-palace of Karnak, located 300 miles up the Nile from Cairo, or the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens may come to mind. Perhaps we would envision Solomon’s temple. Essential to each of these massive structures was the cornerstone. Such a stone was structurally significant. In Jesus’ day people selected a cornerstone with care and laid it with great ceremony; the stone itself determined the lines of the architecture of the building. All the building took shape from the cornerstone. Today a cornerstone is merely decorative.

Simon Peter spoke of Jesus as the Cornerstone. This imagery was not unique. Following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, though, Peter explained how believers are joined with the Cornerstone in both identity and task.

The Cornerstone

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah saw the laying of the stone: “Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation” (Isa. 28:16). In his day people understood Isaiah was referring “to the massive stonework of the Temple, symbolizing the Lord’s abiding presence among his people, a feature which was firm, unshakeable, [and] reliable.”

Jesus’ response to the chief priests and elders pointed to the reality of this Cornerstone: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?” (Matt. 21:42). Referring to the Israelites during their exodus, Paul spoke of that Stone: “All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4).

Throughout, Scripture speaks of a mysterious, mighty, majestic, moving Stone. That Stone is Christ, and He is the Cornerstone of the church. That was Peter’s message; he called that Cornerstone the “living stone” (1 Pet. 2:4). The phrase appears to be an oxymoron, as if one were to say, “cool fire” or “bright darkness.” We normally speak of someone as “stone dead.” Yet the Bible calls the Lord both the Rock and the Life (Ps. 18:2; John 11:25).

This says something about Christ that can be stated no other way. In Him, the living Stone, are vitality, life, energy, growth, and movement. Only the phrase “living stone” can accurately describe our great Cornerstone.

Peter explained, however, that the Cornerstone is a rejected Stone. In the phrase “rejected by men” (1 Pet. 2:4), the Greek term translated “rejected” means to be disallowed after having been inspected. Although that Stone was in the eyes of God “choice and precious”—meaning “well-hewn and valuable for building”—people generally rejected and set aside that Stone.

The psalmist foresaw this: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22). This was Jesus’ prediction of Himself: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected” (Luke 9:22). This was Peter’s passionate proclamation of Him, “This Jesus is ‘the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone’” (Acts 4:11). But God’s perspective is that Jesus is God’s chosen and precious Cornerstone. From Him the spiritual temple takes its shape.

Living Stones

Peter enlarged the scene. He described Christ building a temple using believers as living stones, “you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:5). That great
Cornerstone is a magnetic stone. Mysteriously, stones are drawn from all around that Cornerstone and into it. Dead, lifeless stones come into contact and are made alive. “Nowhere else in the New Testament are believers called living stones.” In Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul declared, “you were dead in trespasses and sins….BUT GOD, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah” (Eph. 2:4-5a emphasis added).

Peter gave the most magnificent picture in Scripture of the church’s dignity and destiny. He described God building a spiritual temple with believers as the living stones of that edifice.

To the Athenians Paul preached, “God who made the world and everything in it … does not live in shrines made by hands” (Acts 17:24). When Paul said that, he was standing in the shadow of the Acropolis at Athens. Years later Paul explained that believers are God’s “temple.”

Believers as Temples
Every believer, although a part of the whole, is a microcosm of the whole. Paul asked, “Don’t you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 6:19a). That the Holy Spirit should condescend to indwell humankind is an utter amazement, but this is reality. Every believer is a temple, but every believer-temple becomes a brick in that temple that God is building. Every follower of Christ is a temple—and at the same time is a living stone in the vast, invisible temple of the ages.

As if looking through a kaleidoscope, Peter again described a changing image. The walls of the living temple dissolve and onlookers see inside its sanctuary. Those who a moment ago were living stones become sacred, holy priests serving in the temple. “You yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

Believers as Priests
Old Testament priests served for limited times in only one place. Peter envisioned a church in which all followers of Christ, at all times and in all places, serve as priests. A believer is a priest everywhere and always—at home, at work, at church, in the community, alone, or with others. According to Peter’s words, every believer holds a sacred office, a believer-priest within the temple of living stones.

What does a believer-priest do? The Latin word for “priest” is pontifex, which comes from two words, one meaning “bridge” and another meaning “to make.” The priest is one who makes or builds a bridge between God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one great...
inside that temple as both the living stones and believer-priests. But what are these priests offering? Each believer-priest is offering up “spiritual sacrifices” (v. 5). Paul explained that Christians are to bring themselves as the spiritual sacrifice: “Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). To become living stones is not enough. God sets us, His followers, in His temple as “a holy priesthood” offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him (1 Pet. 2:5). We set ourselves apart for His exclusive use. This is the miracle of living stones!

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1. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

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Jimmy Draper is the President Emeritus of LifeWay Christian Resources and lives in Colleyville, Texas.
By
Gregory T. Pouncey
Paul was a master at using metaphors to create powerful images and understanding in the minds of his readers.

Left: Terra-cotta figurine of a pedagogue and student, dated 3rd-2nd centuries B.C.; about 6 in. tall. In Hellenistic culture, a pedagogue was an adult male who was responsible for the moral and social education of a young boy. This was the term Paul used to describe the Law, “But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (paidagogos; Gal. 3:25; HCSB).

Above: Bronze gladiatorial helmet, Roman 1st–2nd centuries A.D. from the gladiatorial contests of the Roman Empire.²

In 2 Timothy 2:1–7, Paul referred to Christians as soldiers, athletes, and farmers. Soldiers did not get involved in civilian affairs, athletes competed according to the rules, and farmers gained a share of their crops. As a prisoner on several occasions, Paul had spent time with soldiers. This led to even more metaphors, such as the Word of God being “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). By drawing upon his environment, Paul tailored his metaphors so his readers could understand the deeper truths of the gospel.

Paul also drew from the Gentile heritage he received from his father (Acts 22:28). He described his conflict with opponents in Ephesus: “I fought wild beasts” (1 Cor. 15:32, NIV). This was an image new. The Holy Spirit now resided in the believer. Those in Corinth who were abusing their bodies through sexual immorality were abusing the dwelling place of God (vv. 18–19). This metaphor would have spoken powerfully to Paul’s Jewish audience.

Some of Paul’s metaphors came from city life. For instance, having viewed the construction of buildings in the city, Paul stated that Jesus Christ was the “cornerstone” (2:20). By using this metaphor, Paul was showing the principal importance of Christ in His own church.

Students of English grammar, literature, and creative writing quickly learn the difference between similes and metaphors. Both are figures of speech designed to strengthen the writer’s communication. Both compare a lesser known truth with something that is much more familiar. The simile uses the words like or as to remind the reader that though the two realities are similar, they are also different. For example, a person may say that someone else is like a rock. A metaphor can make the same comparison without like or as, and it makes the writer’s comparison even stronger. In this case, the writer would say that the person is a rock. No reader would think that the person was an inanimate object. Rather, the reader would transfer the properties of the rock that apply, such as its strength. The metaphor makes a stronger comparison than the simile. Certainly one might misunderstand the distinction between the reality and the metaphor, but that is a risk the writer takes in delivering descriptive writing.¹

Paul had many sources from which to draw his metaphors. He had both a Jewish and Gentile background. As an educated Jew and a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), Paul had a wealth of images he could use as metaphors. He called the Christian’s body a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19, ESV). Using that metaphor, he contrasted the difference between the old covenant and the new. The Holy Spirit now resided in the believer. Those in Corinth who were abusing their bodies through sexual immorality were abusing the dwelling place of God (vv. 18–19). This metaphor would have spoken powerfully to Paul’s Jewish audience.
Paul also referred to some people as honorable bowls and some as dishonorable bowls (2 Tim. 2:20). A household may have had bowls of silver and gold, but they also had some made of wood and clay. Like fine china in a modern house, these silver and gold bowls were reserved for special usage. With this metaphor Paul encouraged Christians to purify themselves so they would be useful to the Lord (v. 21).

Although many of Paul’s metaphors came from city life, he also drew upon rural life for imagery. He encouraged Christians not to be “unequally yoked” with an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14, ESV). By comparing a Christian’s relationship to a “yoke,” Paul made a powerful statement about entering a working relationship with an unbeliever. One of the three metaphors Paul used in 2 Timothy 1:1-7 was of the farmer. The farmer’s patience and diligence ensured that he would eat, and Paul compared Christians who were sowing seeds of the Spirit with the hardworking farmer. Whether in the city or country, Paul constantly examined familiar ways to speak of possibly new or unfamiliar spiritual truths.

Another resource for Paul’s metaphors was the Roman government. He called Christian witnesses “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). Paul believed that like ambassadors, who lived in a foreign land while representing their homeland, Christians represented the kingdom of God in a world that needed to know Him. Additionally, Paul called Jesus the “mediator” (1 Tim. 2:5). A mediator was a person between two parties who tried to resolve differences and bring the two parties together. The metaphor powerfully demonstrated Jesus’ resolve to make people right with God. In Philippians 3:20, Paul described salvation as citizenship in heaven. As a Roman colony, Philippi had a strong view of citizenship, thus strengthening this metaphor. Again, Paul was demonstrating his ability to use metaphors that would best speak to a certain group of readers.

Paul also drew metaphors from the world of commerce. He called the Holy Spirit the “down payment” of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14, HCSB). Paul called himself a “debtor” to those who needed the gospel (Rom. 1:14, KJV). Paul refused to identify himself with the metaphor of “peddler” that many in Corinth had labeled him (2 Cor. 2:17, ESV). The Corinthians would have made the connection; the term referred to those who peddled goods such as wine and yet diluted it before they sold it. In contrast, Paul spoke with...
sincerity or purity in his message about Christ.

The apostle turned to the world of education and training of children to deliver one of his most powerful metaphors about the Law. He stated that the Law was a “guardian” that had custody of a person before he put his faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:25-26, esv). A guardian was a slave who took a young pupil for instruction and protected him until he was old enough to protect himself. When the gospel came along, the guardian’s job was done. The Law had pointed people to Christ. That was not to say that the Law was invalid, but it had fulfilled its greatest purpose.

As seen by Paul’s various sources for his metaphors, the apostle, when conveying spiritual truths, showed himself adept at choosing everyday images that people already knew. Indeed, Paul was a master at using metaphors to create powerful images in the minds of his readers—metaphors that strengthened others’ understanding about him, his message, their salvation, and the church. Why were Paul’s metaphors such a powerful component of his writing?

They spoke truth to readers of his day—and that truth has proven timeless. Believers today still affirm that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We are ambassadors for Christ. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our salvation. Christians should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Even centuries later, Paul’s metaphors remain meaningful. They give continuing evidence of the apostle’s outstanding eye for everyday items that would speak eternal and powerful truths.

2. Ibid., 264.
3. Ibid., 32.
4. HCSB Study Bible (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 2040.
5. Williams, Paul’s Metaphors, 171.
6. Other translations of guardian include tutor (NASB, NKJV) and schoolmaster (KJV).
7. HCSB Study Bible, 2018.

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Ezekiel & Jeremiah

A COMPARISON
By Kevin C. Peacock

Jeremiah was some 20 to 30 years Ezekiel’s senior, but as contemporaries, each with a life-changing call from God to be a prophet to His people and to the foreign nations, their messages had great harmony. They preached on many of the same subjects though often highlighted different emphases. They both spoke on the issue of individual responsibility (Jer. 31:27-30; Ezek. 18:32; 33:7-20), prophesied of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (Jer. 7:11-15; 26:1-24; Ezek. 1-24), and both spoke of a “new covenant” that God would bring about that would result in individuals having a “new heart” (Jer. 24:7; 31:31-34; 32:38-40; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27). These similarities do not mean, however, that God simply called the same type of person to deliver these messages. Each prophet had a unique background, personality, and giftedness with which to deliver God’s message.

Background
Jeremiah’s ministry began “in the thirteenth year” of Josiah’s reign (627 B.C.) and extended into the exile to around 580 B.C., a ministry of around 47 years (Jer. 1:1-3; chs. 40–44). Jeremiah was “a youth” at the time of his call (1:6), probably in his teens or early twenties. He ministered in and around Jerusalem, but apparently he continued to live in Anathoth, his hometown, located about three miles northeast of Jerusalem (11:21; 12:6; 32:7). As such, he was an eyewitness to a horrible tragedy, the fall of Jerusalem.

The Babylonians took Ezekiel from Jerusalem into exile in 597 B.C. along with Judah’s King Jehoiachin and 10,000 captives (2 Kings 24:10-14). He dated his ministry “in the thirtieth year,” which corresponds with “the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile” (Ezek. 1:1-2). This likely refers to Ezekiel’s age at the time of his prophetic call, the age when priests normally undertook their ministry (Num. 4:30). As such, he would thus have been born around 622 B.C. and taken into captivity at age 25. In his early years Ezekiel may have heard Jeremiah’s preaching, because Jeremiah had caused quite a stir in the city. The two may also have been acquaintances.

Ezekiel was “the priest, the son of Buzi” (Ezek. 1:3). His familiarity with the Jerusalem temple’s layout, correct and aberrant worship forms, Israel’s spiritual heritage, and Levitical and priestly issues indicates that even as a young man before the exile, Ezekiel was at least a priest in training, preparing to serve in the Jerusalem temple. Ezekiel’s interest in the Zadokite priests (44:15-31) may indicate that his descent was from Zadok back to Aaron’s son Eleazar (1 Chron. 6:3-15; 24:3). Instead of being installed as a priest in his thirtieth year, Ezekiel received his call as a prophet.

The family life of each prophet became a vital part of their messages. The Lord never allowed Jeremiah to marry (Jer. 16:1-4), demonstrating the loneliness and the loss of joy His people would soon experience. Ezekiel, however, was happily married—but the death of his beloved wife coincided with the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek. 24:15-27). God did not allow Ezekiel to express his grief publicly, emulating the inconsolable sorrow the people would soon experience as their beloved city fell and their loved ones died.

Personality and Style
We learn much of Jeremiah’s inner personality from his writings. His messages of God’s judgment filled him with agony and grief (Jer. 8:18-22). A series of prayers known as his...
“Confessions” displays his personal struggles with God about his lot in life and the messages he was to preach.6 In these “he cries for vindication, and even hurls defiance at God.”7 These glimpses into Jeremiah’s prayer closet show a devout faith tinged with doubt, rebellion, self-pity, and despair—yet a dogged tenacity never to let go of God.

Ironically, even though almost all of Ezekiel’s prophetic oracles are written in first person, seldom do they display his personal thoughts and reactions.8 For the most part he accepted his divine assignments without any protest even though they took their physical and emotional toll.9 Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel’s response was not to complain but instead to see these difficult assignments as God’s call to make himself totally available to Him, “to place himself and all that he [had and was] at the service of God’s cause.”10

Visions from God were not uncommon for prophets, and Jeremiah had a few (Jer. 1:11-14); but Ezekiel’s visions were numerous, long, and expanded.11 Ezekiel did not just see the vision, but he became part of the vision. He personally ate the scroll offered to him (Ezek. 3:2-3); God personally transported Ezekiel from one place to another (3:12-15; 8:3-4; 37:11; 40:3-3); he walked through the old (ch. 8) and new temples (chs. 40-42) and the valley of dry bones (37:2) and there he delivered God’s word (11:4; 37:4,9). His powerful prophecy brought death (11:13) and caused life (37:7-10).

Both prophets employed symbolic actions with their messages, but in Ezekiel’s ministry dramatic actions and visual aids were far more frequent. He directed his prophecies by facing the recipients of that message, even the distant lands.12 He would clap his hands and stomp his feet to heighten the impact (Ezek. 6:11; 21:14). He was thus an active and physical participant in the message of his oracles. Other prophets used images and figures of speech; Ezekiel had actual experiences. Jeremiah described God’s words as, “Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart” (Jer. 15:16), but for Ezekiel, God’s words became a literal meal (Ezek. 3:2-3). Isaiah pictured God’s judgment like a razor that would shave the head, body, and beard of his people (Isa. 7:20), but Ezekiel got a literal haircut (Ezek. 5:1-2).

Ministry and Message
Jeremiah faced open hostility throughout much of his ministry. In contrast, Ezekiel’s audience was stubborn (3:4-11), but he did not face hatred and open resistance. The elders of the community consulted with him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1), and the people flocked to hear him after his prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem came true (33:30-33).

Generally speaking, the two major influences on Jeremiah’s preaching
Below: This sandstone block contains the name of King Haa-ib-Re, known from Greek sources as Apries, and from the Old Testament as Hophra (Jeremiah 44:30). Apries was king of Egypt when Jerusalem fell in 586. Apries ruled Egypt until his death in 570 B.C.

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