

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Building Upon The Bedrock

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"...upon this bedrock *I will build My ekklēsia*" -- Matthew 16:18

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND:

I have mentioned that Matthew 16:18 is a watershed verse, regarding the revelation of God's plan for His people. We have looked at the significance of Jesus' choice to bypass the word "synagogue" in favor of the less defined "ekklēsia". Both were words used of the "gathered people" of God in the Greek translation of the OT. "Synagogue" had been used to describe more of the religious gatherings of Israel, where ekklēsia was descriptive of other, more generic gatherings of God's people. By choosing to use ekklēsia to describe the people He would "call out", Jesus was implying that He was breaking with the "synagogue" practices and traditions, and was recruiting people to gather for a different purpose. This meant that ekklēsia practices and dynamics would not be the same as those found in the "synagogue" system they had all been raised in.

Today we are going to consider another significant term that Jesus employed in Matthew 16:18. Again, it was a term with a deeper meaning, and wider ramifications than what the casual English reader from our time could possibly appreciate. This term is the Greek word, oikodomeō, which literally means, "I build a house". There are actually **two significant OT themes** that use this same Greek word in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT [LXX], translated from the Hebrew ca. 250 B.C). These two separate themes are utilized by Jesus and brought together to describe the calling and destiny of ekklēsia as a people being "called out", assembled and constructed by the Christ, the descendant of David, to be a house for God.

### I. "Building up" a people:

Jeremiah 1:10 -- "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, *to build* and to plant."

24:6 -- "For I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and *I will build them up* and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up."

31:4 -- "Again, *I will build you*, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!..."

33:7 -- "And I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and *I will rebuild them* as they were at first."

Interestingly enough, **this was strictly an OT concept**, not a word picture found anywhere else in any secular Greek literature. The Greek culture did not use oikodomeō for building up a nation.

**Jesus had come to be the Builder of the Nation:** The image of rebuilding, restoring and establishing a people (Israel) is *exactly* the word picture that Jesus is employing here in Matthew 16 -- "I will build My congregation, My assembled people".

### II. Building a House for God to dwell in:

I Chronicles 17:1-15 – According to this passage, *a descendant of David will build a house for God, and the Lord will establish his throne forever.* -- vss. 14,15.

Solomon was *not* the one prophesied about -- I Kg. 10:14-12:15; Jer. 7:1-15; 26:1-13; Jer. 22:1-9; 52:1-23.

**Jesus had come to be the Builder of a house for God:** Jesus claimed *He* was the One who would build the temple -- Jn. 2:15-22.

He spoke of a spiritual temple "made without hands", not a physical building "made with hands" -- Mk. 14:53-59; cf. Dan. 2:34,35,44,45; 8:25; Acts 6:8-14; 7:46-50; 17:24; Heb. 9:11,24.

**"And I also say to you that you are Peter (petros - a masculine noun meaning "a detached stone, boulder"), and upon this rock (petra - a feminine noun meaning "bedrock") I will build My ekklēsia."**

Note: There is no way anyone from that culture would have linked petros and petra, since they are two totally separate words of different gender and definition. What Jesus was saying to Peter was that **the spiritual insight that He was the Messiah was the bedrock** upon which He would build. **Peter**, as the first person to have acknowledged Him as Messianic King, **would be the first stone or boulder placed into the foundation** of this spiritual temple. This did not necessarily give Peter any special prerogatives than what others had. He was just first. [Cf. Matt. 18:17-20 -- where the authority to "bind and loose" is something that belongs to the church. The Greek is now "you (plural)" instead of "you (singular)", as it had been in Matt. 16:19.]

**Christ came to lay a foundation and initiate a building process to build a spiritual house which God would dwell in. The ekklēsia is comprised of individuals "called together" to construct this living temple.**

**These two OT themes of "building up a people" and "building a temple for God" are united together in prophetic fulfillment in the ekklēsia.**

A closer look at Jesus' words:

"I will build" is a future tense of the Greek word oikodomeō. The word oikos is the Greek word for "house" or "family dwelling". The word domeō (from which the English word, *dome*, is derived) is from a Greek verb meaning "I build, construct".

**Oikodomeō literally means "I build a house" or, in a context like this, the word picture would be "I will house-build My ekklēsia".** "House-build" adds color and images to the word picture which we would otherwise miss in our English translations.

What would have been the most common building material for houses in that part of the world? Instead of wood-framed log cabins, or wood sided homes, as we might imagine from *our* experience, the most commonly available building materials of ancient Palestine were stones, or boulders.

What was the process involved? How did someone go about constructing a house? What we know of the process certainly involved digging down to bedrock to find a solid foundation (cf. Matt. 7:24,25). **A *corner stone*, then, became the starting point from which everything else was measured as plumb and square. It was the point of reference for the rest of the structure.**

Ephesians 2:19-22 -- "So then, you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are also fellow citizens with the saints, and are of *God's house*, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in Whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

I Peter 2:4-5 -- "And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a *spiritual house* for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

## **Word pictures associated with the building process that are applicable to the ekklēsia:**

**Process** -- The use of this word reminds us that the construction and formation of us as God's people, as a unified, functional "house for God to dwell in" is happening over time. It is not a momentary project that God is involved in here. It is a long-term project. This is true whether we look at it in terms of our own personal lives, and the relationships we develop with other Christians, or if we look at it from the big picture perspective, which covers the entire scope of human history. The ekklēsia is in a process of being formed.

**Assembly** -- We are individual pieces being brought together, and fitted together, in some kind of connecting process, similar to the construction of a stone house. Again, time is required, but it is also important to see that I am just one individual part in this massive construction project. I do not stand alone, but I am to find a place with others, somehow. Together we can form a structure that cannot exist when we are apart.

**Tooling** -- One of the realities of building a house from stones is that often a certain amount of shaping and tooling of the stones would be required. This would be both functional (to fit the stones together more closely and solidly) and aesthetic (to create a smoother, more beautiful wall). We can expect God to shape and tool off our rough edges, as well, so that we may be more effectively fitted together, or so that we may fulfill the design and expectations of the Master Builder.

**Individuals** -- We must never lose sight of the tension between the fact that we are individuals, who are designed to fulfill a unique purpose, and that part of our purpose is to fit together with other believers to create a mosaic that could never be expressed, or communicated, by us alone. If we lose sight of our individuality, we will not effectively carry off our unique contribution, for it requires our full stature. If we lose sight of our "corporate calling", if you will, we will not understand the tooling and shaping required to ready us to take our place with others in the structure God is constructing.

**Placement** -- In the construction of a stone house, individual stones are set into place next to other stones in order to construct a cohesive whole. This represents the fact that we are in relationship with, or in close proximity to, a limited number of other "stones" in our experience. In order to fit together well, we will be shaped to adapt to fit those near us. Furthermore, some stones will be in contact with more stones than others. Some will be more "visible" than others. A stone set in an outside corner of a wall will have fewer "connections" with other stones than one set right in the middle of a wall, with stones on every side. In the same way, not every believer will have close relationships with a large number of people. A stone set at eye level on the face of the wall will be more noticed than a stone hidden away within the wall. The "hidden stone" is as important to the structure and integrity of the wall as the more noticeable ones, however. In fact, often they carry more of the actual weight load, while the decorative stone is there primarily for appearance.

**Cement** -- Usually stone walls were put together using some kind of mortar to bind the stones together, and to fill in the spaces between the rocks. *The cement that binds us is relationship.* It makes us more sturdy and stable than we would be if we were just a pile of rocks, ...individuals in proximity with each other, but having no "binding bond".

**Plumb** -- The concept of being plumb and square in relation to the corner stone, and the other stones in the building implies a coordinated effort, a plan or design in building, a standard, to which we are to align ourselves. Again, we are not *only* individuals, we are to be in relationship with others. We must consider if we are fulfilling the blueprint God has for us in relation to the whole.

**Spiritual** -- The house of God is spiritual, not material. The dwelling of God is not a physical building. Rather, He dwells inside of us as a group.