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THE NEW SHOFAR

The priesthood of God has become the eminent power for good in the world. We are no longer a handful of people on the fringes of society. This great power for good has been entrusted to us, and we must not weaken it by failing in our responsibilities. James E Faust

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***You shine as luminaries in the world, holding fast the word of life, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom* (Philipp 2:15).**

The power of one and two Peter is that they were written **between 62 and 68 AD** and **Jesus died 33 AD.** This means that we are looking at a highly developed theology of the Church, at a very early stage, indicative of the depth of the passion of their faith in Jesus Christ as God's Messiah, the Son of God who died on the cross for our redemption, our salvation. This teaching then, is one that has the capacity to encourage, strengthen, reassure and to fill us with Hope.

God has *created* us and *called* us to be in the world, for the world

He is the living stone, rejected by human beings …**vs.4-5:** In these two verses Peter used the image of a house, or temple, made of stones. Echoing Psalm 34, Peter calls us to *come to him*, to Jesus himself, *a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God*. This phrase is drawn from two Old Testament texts: **Psalm 118:22** and **Isaiah 28:16** (Peter will quote both texts below in vv. 6–8). Jesus is the "stone" that the Father has given to serve as the foundation of God's own house. Even in the face of a savage rejection by the Jewish leaders of his day, God gave Him the victory over sin and death by raising him up from the darkness of the grave. At that moment he was made the foundation of the Church. He is a very different kind of stone, a "living" stone because, though rejected and cut off in death, he has been raised from the dead and now lives. Lives with us, in us and through us, and as well "lives" at the side of God in eternity.

In a radical manner, Peter then applies the imagery of "stones" directly to the Christian people. ***We are*** now given the invitation to become ***as living stones*** who through the power of the Holy Spirit, collaborate with divine grace so that ***we are being built up into a spiritual house***. The Greek verb here is in the passive form, indicating that the "building up" is the work of God, is what God wants and what God is doing, is always doing.

But This is no ordinary house made of lifeless stones. What God is doing is establishing on earth the true ***spiritual temple*** of God that has living members, with Christ himself the cornerstone of that temple. In the Old Testament the temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God among his people. We the Christian people have now become the dwelling place of God; we are **living stones** built together into **a dwelling place of God in the Spirit**. An answer to the question where is God in the world is today can now be answered. In us. God works through us as living images in the likeness of Christ.

Temples need priests to offer sacrifices to God

Further to this, we are called to serve in this house as **a holy priesthood.** Here the imagery slides from that of the building to those who serve in that building. A priest is one called to serve in God's temple. He offers sacrifices and brings the prayers and needs of the people before the Lord. Peter goes deeper than this, calling the Church a "holy priesthood" called **to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**? He does not develop the practical implications here, but we should note that he is not referring specifically to the ordained priesthood. Rather, it is *the entire Christian people by virtue of their baptism into Christ* who have entered into the inheritance given to the people of Israel to be a "royal priesthood" (**v. 9; Exodus 19:6**). We are all called to stand before the Lord as priests, offering our lives as living sacrifices, bringing to God the needs of those around us, along with the hopes, joys and sufferings of all of God's people, and not just our fellow Christians.

What are those *Spiritual Sacrifice required of us: not a complete list*

Apart from Jesus teachings in Matthew 5-7(The Sermon on the Mount) our sacrifices include **Praise and Worship:** Believers are often encouraged to give "the fruit of lips that confess His name" Song, prayer, and worship gatherings become offerings when done as sincere expressions of love and gratitude to God. **Repentance and Surrender:** Where sin is present, offering a broken and contrite heart is described as a pleasing devotion. Turning from wrongdoing and choosing God's ways constitute authentic spiritual sacrifices that acknowledge His holiness.

Service and Kindness: Doing good deeds and sharing resources are seen as acceptable sacrifices. Acts of love, mercy, and ministry among others flow from a heart transformed by God's grace. **Daily Life Offerings:** Every aspect of a believer's life-from a work ethic motivated by integrity to resisting temptation-can be dedicated as an ongoing spiritual sacrifice. In this way, the ordinary moments become sacred opportunities to honour the One who redeemed them.

To support his point Peter ties together three Old Testament texts that concern a "stone" in God's plan. The first (v. 6) is from **Isaiah 28:16**, where the Lord God reprimands those who put their trust in other gods and promises that he himself will establish among his people a cornerstone, chosen and precious to him, such that **whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame**. The second is an exact quotation of Psalm 118:22: **The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.** Here, the psalmist rebukes those who reject the "stone" that the Lord himself is establishing as the cornerstone of his own house. The third (v. 8) is a loose adaptation of Isaiah 8:14, in which the prophet chides both houses of Israel for failing to believe the Lord who will become for these faithless ones **a stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall**.

Spiritual sacrifices centre on ***intentionally*** offering heart, mind, and life to God in response to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Though Scripture references the rituals of the Old Testament, the New Testament clarifies that every believer now shares in a holy priesthood, presenting acts of worship, praise, kindness, service, and daily obedience as offerings that delight God and glorify the Creator.