

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXXII : VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RECONCILIATION (2:11-22)

## Present Position of Gentile Christians (2:19-22)

*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (KJV)*

*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. (NIV)*

*Then, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being chief corner-[stone], in whom all the building fitly framed together doth increase to an holy sanctuary in the Lord, in whom also ye are builded together, for a habitation of God in the Spirit. (Young's Literal Translation)*

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands —

<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time:

- separate from Christ,
- excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and
- strangers to the covenants of promise,
- having no hope
- and without God in the world.

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace,

- *who did make both groups into one*
- and did break down the dividing wall of hostility,

<sup>15</sup> by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, *so that, in order that*

- *in Himself He might make the two into one new man*, thus establishing peace,
- <sup>16</sup> *and might reconcile them both in one body* to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

<sup>17</sup> AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

<sup>18</sup> for through Him we both have our access by one Spirit to the Father.

<sup>19</sup> *So then ... [CONSEQUENTLY, THEREFORE]*

**imagery: the STATE —**

you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints,

**imagery: the FAMILY —**

and are members of God's household,

**imagery: a BUILDING —**

<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

**imagery: a TEMPLE —**

<sup>21</sup> *in whom* the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

<sup>22</sup> *in whom* you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

**v19** — “The first Gentile believers who were admitted to a church comprising Jewish Christians could well have felt ill at ease; it was desirable that they should be made to feel completely at home. The church had a Jewish base; its members had Jewish presuppositions, and it would have been too easy for Gentile Christians to do or say something which was felt to be out of place.

What indeed was their status in such a community? Were they

there on sufferance, as visitors, like the God-fearing Gentiles who attended synagogues in cities of the dispersion? Was their position like that of resident aliens in a Greek city, or that of peregrini in Rome? In a crisis like that which arose in Antioch when Peter and others abandoned the practice of table-fellowship with Gentile Christians Paul protested vigorously at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), and it is Paul’s attitude that finds uncompromising expression here.” [Bruce, 302] As Bruce goes on to note, this door swang both ways in the course of time. “In writing to the Christians of Rome, Paul implies that some of the Gentiles among them were inclined to look down on their Jewish fellow-Christians as poor relations, mercifully rescued from an apostate nation, and he warns them against such an attitude: ‘remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you’ (Rom 11:18). They had been cut out of the wild olive, the fruitless shoot to which they originally belonged, and grafted into the good olive tree, to share the nutriment and fertility of the true people of God. The credit was not theirs; they were entirely indebted to God’s mercy. In our present epistle there is no suggestion that its Gentile recipients stood in need of such a warning; what they are given is full encouragement to magnify the grace of God which has rescued them from their former place as rank outsiders and instated them among his children.” [Bruce, 303]

**So then, consequently, therefore** — ἄρα οὖν [ara oun] This is a combination frequently used by Paul (Rom 5:18; 7:3, 25; 8:12; 9:16, 18; 14:12, 19; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:6; 2 Thess 2:15). This is what some call an “emphatically inferential connective” and indicates a conclusion is now drawn from what proceeds. The discussion of the Jewish-Gentile relationship reaches its climax in vv. 19-22.

**IMAGERY OF THE STATE** — **you are no longer strangers and aliens** — οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι [ouketi este zenoi kai paroikoi] It is difficult to exactly distinguish the differences between these two words because their significance varied in different communities. “The two words were often used synonymously in the LXX. If there is any distinction, the former describes a person from another tribe or country, while the latter has in view the stranger who lives in the land as a resident alien.” [O’Brien, 211] “‘Foreigners’ – In secular matters, the word would mean a resident alien, a non-naturalized foreigner; liable to legal removal at any moment, e.g. on outbreak of war. If such a word were true of Gentile Christians, they would be merely tolerated sojourners, as it were, in the ‘city’ of Messianic light and mercy, without any claim to abide. The glorious contrary was the case.” [Moule, 82] **strangers** — ξένοι [zenoi] stranger, foreigner; the opposite would be ‘citizen’. **aliens, sojourners, foreigners** — πάροικοι [paroikoi] literally, of a non-citizen or resident alien; used of believers whose real citizenship is in heaven; the opposite would be ‘member of a family’. “Old word for dweller by (near by, but not in).” [Robertson, Word Pictures]

**but you are fellow citizens** — ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται [alla este sumpolitai] v. 19a was negative (“not strangers and aliens”), v. 19b is positive (“you are citizens”). “But the readers are no longer completely without a homeland; they are no longer even second-class citizens in someone else’s homeland. They now have full citizenship in and belong firmly to a commonwealth, for they are fellow citizens with the holy ones.” [Lincoln, 150] Note Paul’s play on words: in v. 12 Paul said the Gentiles did not belong to the ‘commonwealth’ of Israel, the πολιτείας [politeias] of Israel. But now through Christ the Gentiles were συμπολίται [sumpolitai], the same word with a prefix meaning ‘together with.’ “Fellow-citizens – old, but rare word, here only in N.T.” [Robertson, Word Pictures]

**with the saints** — τῶν ἁγίων [tōn hagiōn] who are these “holy ones”? (a) Jewish patriarchs; so Chrysostom; (b) the Jews; so Barth, Bengel; this would imply Christians are joined to Israel which retained its position before God, but this view has already been rejected and this word does not normally mean the Jews when used in the NT; (c) Jewish Christians; (d) Christians; this is the word’s usual meaning in the NT but it is a complex manner by which to simply say Gentiles are now part of the church; (e) angels, heavenly beings; this is possible; (f) glorified believers. According to Ernest Best, the combination of the last two seems the most satisfactory in this context. This also goes along well with Paul’s emphasis upon the heavenlies in Ephesians. Lincoln agrees, stating it refers to either all believers or angels. But after giving lengthy reasons why angels is a viable possibility (quoting and referring to both secular writings as the Qumran writings and Philo, as well as parallel passages in scripture) Lincoln leans towards the reference to ‘all believers’ since he considers every other use of ‘holy ones’ in Ephesians to refer to all believers and thus it would not be prudent to consider this differently. “The readers are to see themselves as fellow citizens with the rest of believers.” [Lincoln, 151]

**IMAGERY CHANGES TO A HOUSEHOLD** — **and members of the household of God,** — καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, [kai oikeioi tou theou,] Paul now changes his metaphor to a household, almost implying kinship. “The house and the city were very similar concepts in the ancient world. This phrase then, unlike the first which referred to a relationship among believers, relates believers to God. Christians form a community related to Christ or God behind which lies the concept of Israel as God’s house. Believers are children of God (2 Cor 6.18), adopted as such (1.5) and given access to him (2.18), the head of the household. All this implies intimacy. The [oikeioi] are members of the house, not necessarily kinfolk but certainly not slaves; nor are they ‘guests — here today and away tomorrow’ — well treated when present but forgotten when gone.... Gentile Christians, once refugees, are now neither homeless nor stateless. Those who were once outsiders are now insiders.” [Best,

**peregrini** — Latin for a pilgrim, a wanderer, or a journeying foreigner. Originally, the Romans divided all persons into Cives and Peregrini: the cives had the faculty of contracting a Roman marriage and the right of acquiring ownership; the peregrini had neither.

278f] This household of God consists of believers, both on earth and in heaven, as well as holy angels. “Members of the family, kinfolk. So the word always means in N.T. (Gal vi. 10; 1 Tim v. 8; here;) and LXX. The idea is not of domestic service, but of the ‘child at home.’” [Moule, 83]

**v20 — IMAGERY CHANGES TO BUILDING — built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,** — ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, [epoikodomēthentes epi tō themeliō tōn apostolōn kai prophētōn, ontos akrogoniāiou autou Christou Iēsou,] “The imagery, having changed from membership of a city to that of a household, now changes to the building which contains the household, and those who dwell in the household (v. 19) are pictured as the bricks with which it is built. The use of building imagery was foreshadowed with the architectural term ‘middle wall’ (v. 14). The building has a foundation, the apostles and prophets, on which believers are built.” [Best, 279]

**THE ASSEMBLY WAS ALREADY “BUILT” PRIOR TO THE ADDITION OF THE READERS — built —** ἐποικοδομηθέντες [epoikodomēthentes] “*The past tense signifies the existence of the building (= the church) prior to the addition to it of the readers, but does not indicate anything about when the church first came into being.*” [Best, 270] “The metaphor of building is used in two distinct ways, statically, in depicting a group of people as an edifice, and dynamically, of the maturing of people in their faith. In the first case the implied subject of the erection of the edifice is God or Christ; in the second it may be either God or Christ, but is more usually believers who build up themselves or one another in conduct and faith. The image is used in 2.20-2 in the first way (cf. 1 Cor 3.9, 16) and in the second in 4.12, 16, 29 (cf 1 Cor 10.23; 14.4-20; 2 Cor 10.8; 12.19; 13.10; 1 Th 5.11).” [Best, 280] Note not all agree with Ernest Best’s understanding of the past tense; Andrew Lincoln believes it refers to the readers’ conversions: “The imagery at the beginning of v 20 involves the readers’ being depicted as bricks which have been built up in a building on top of a foundation (cf. also v 22). The aorist passive participle ἐποικοδομηθέντες [epoikodomēthentes], ‘having been built,’ indicates both that this being placed on a foundation has already occurred for the readers, presumably in their conversion-initiation, and that God is to be understood now as the one who has brought this about.” [Lincoln, 152]

**THE FOUNDATION IS NOT CHRIST BUT THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS (WE MUST TAKE ALL METAPHORS IN THEIR CONTEXT) — on the foundation of the apostles and prophets —** ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν [epi tō themeliō tōn apostolōn kai prophētōn] “Like all buildings the edifice of v. 20 has a foundation. In 1 Cor 3.10 it is Jesus Christ and it is laid by Paul, not God. It is possible to take a similar meaning here and see the apostles and prophets as those who lay the foundation, so NEB ‘built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets’; this is changed in REB to the more correct ‘the foundation of the apostles and prophets’. In v. 20 Christ, a person, is one stone in the building and it is difficult to see the apostles and prophets as those who built him in; only the desire to harmonize v. 20 with 1 Cor 3.10 could have led to the NEB translation.... *[T]here is no reason why [Paul] should not have modified his use of the building metaphor from 1 Cor 3.10; authors regularly vary their use of metaphors.*” [Best, 280f] “These changes in metaphor are no argument in themselves for diversity of authorship; metaphors may be altered to emphasize this or that lesson.” [Bruce, 304] Most of those I studied teach Paul is speaking of the apostles and prophets as the foundation:

“They are *built on the foundation*, — they are founded on the doctrine, *of the apostles and prophets.*” [Calvin, Ephesians]

“The foundation which consists of them [i.e., the apostles and prophets]; in the sense that their doctrine is the basis of the faith, and so of the unity, of the saints.” [Moule, 83]

“It is possible indeed, with the NEB, to understand ‘the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets’; but it is more natural to understand the foundation as consisting of the apostles and prophets.... Apostles and prophets constitute the foundation ministries in the church, not only in Ephesians but in 1 Corinthians: ‘God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets ...’ (1 Cor 12:28).” [Bruce, 304]

“[T]he apostles and prophets are themselves the foundation. It is true that elsewhere, with the exception of Rev. xxi. 14, Christ is the foundation, not the apostles; but here Christ is the corner-stone, and the passage in Rev., although not precisely parallel, quite justifies our interpretation here.... What seems a graver objection is that Christ seems thus to be named only as ‘*primus inter pares.*’ The answer to this is that by Orientals the corner-stone was reckoned of greater importance than the foundation, and as connecting and concentrating on itself the weight of the building. Hence the expression in Isa. xxviii. 16, alluded to here, and 2 Pet. ii. 6; cf. Ps. cxviii. 22; Acts iv. 11; Matt. xxi. 42.” [Abbott, 71]

**primus inter pares** – the first among equals or first among peers; a Latin phrase describing the most senior person of a group sharing the same rank or office

“[The apostles and prophets] form a single foundation because they first proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles.... This does not mean τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν [apostolōn kai prophētōn] is a subjective genitive (‘the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets’), a position to which 1 Cor 3:11 drove some earlier commentators.... The phrase, as most interpreters now recognize, is a genitive of apposition (‘the foundation, that is, the apostles and prophets’). This reading keeps the people in the passage (the Gentile Christian audience, the apostles, and Christ) together as part of the building and so provides a more consistent use of the architectural figure.” [Thielman, 180]

**PAUL REFERS TO THE APOSTLES EVEN THOUGH HE IS ONE HIMSELF —** “If one is surprised that Paul should refer so to the apostles, he being one himself, Peter does the same thing (2Pe 3:2). Paul repeats this language in 3:5.” [Robertson,

**NOTE THE FOUNDATION OF THE ASSEMBLY (CHURCH) IS NOT ISRAEL** — “The foundation is not of course the rock or ground on which the lowest stones or bricks are laid but the lowest level of the building on which the remainder rests. *We might have expected [Paul] to say that the foundation of the church was Israel rather than the apostles and prophets; in not doing so he indicates that the church is not just a simple continuation of Israel.*” [Best, 281]

**THE APOSTLES AND NT PROPHETS ARE TWO DISTINCT GROUPS** — “But who are the apostles and prophets and why are they introduced? *Apostles and prophets are different groups and not, as the non-repetition of the article might suggest, the same group, defined by two different titles, apostles who are prophets* (in Rev 21.14 the apostles alone are the foundation)... There is no apparent reason why apostles should be termed prophets at 2.20; they are clearly not so in the list of 4.11. On the other hand there is no reason to see in v. 20 an abbreviation of the list of 4.11, as if the foundation included others than these two groups. The two groups however are so tied together by the one article that those who wish to deduce from the reference to the apostles as foundation that the church is apostolic must equally be ready to accept that the church is prophetic.” [Best, 281]

**THE APOSTLES** — “*Neither apostles nor prophets are precisely identified by their titles for both terms are used loosely. Apostle can have a wide sense with undefined edges and be somewhat equivalent to ‘missionary’ (Rom 16.7; 1 Th 2.6) and a restricted sense as indicating the Twelve or the Twelve plus Paul; it can denote missionary figures of the first generation and include Paul and Barnabas (cf Acts 14.4, 14). There is little in our context to indicate which sense is intended, but in 3.5 where there is a parallel usage it probably means the Twelve without Paul since he appears separately at 3.3....* It is sometimes argued that Paul could never have spoken of himself as the foundation and that therefore we can deduce non-Pauline authorship, yet in the light of the unique position he sometimes gives to himself it is not impossible that he should have described himself as part of the foundation. Moreover to speak of people as foundation does not imply that they are a past group and dead; ‘he founded our society’ may be said of someone who is still alive. ‘A modern missionary might speak of himself and his colleagues as the pioneering workers, and no one would accuse him of self-exaltation.’” [Best, 281f]

**THE PROPHETS** — “*The prophets are NT prophets.* This identification is confirmed by the order of the wording (it is difficult to suppose OT prophets would be placed second) and particularly by the other references to apostles and prophets in 3:5 and 4:11, where NT prophets are unambiguously in view.... The NT prophets in view then are presumably the men and women who exercise the gift of prophecy under discussion in 1 Cor 11 and 14 and whose activities are mentioned elsewhere in Rom 12:6; 1 Thess 5:20; Acts 11:27; 13:1, 2; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9, 10; Rev 1:3; 10:11; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 19:10; 22:6-10, 18, 19.” [Lincoln, 153] “The prophets were taken to be those of the OT by Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Ambrosiaster, Calvin, Beza.... More generally, from Pelagius onwards, they have been assumed to be those of the early church who either foresaw the future (Acts 11.28; 21.10f) and / or proclaimed the truth of God in particular situations. Had the OT prophets been intended the order would have been ‘the prophets and the apostles’. If [Paul] had been wishing to refer to the OT since the foundation of the church is being considered, a better phrase would have been ‘the law, the prophets and the apostles’. In 3.5 where we again have the double phrase it is early church prophets who are intended for OT prophets are hardly responsible for the command to evangelise the Gentiles. **In 4.11 the prophets are charismatic figures who are listed among the ministers of the church and therefore must be NT prophets.**” [Best, 282f]

**THE PROPHETS ARE ‘NT PROPHETS’** — reasons why these ‘prophets’ are understood to be NT prophets:

- Had the OT prophets been intended the order would have been ‘the prophets and the apostles’
- If Paul had been wishing to refer to the OT since the foundation of the church is being considered, a better phrase would have been ‘the law, the prophets and the apostles.’ I realize these first two reasons are subjective but they are still valid considerations.
- NT prophets mentioned in Rom 12:6; 1 Thess 5:20; Acts 11:27; 13:1, 2; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9, 10; Rev 1:3; 10:11; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 19:10; 22:6-10, 18, 19. There is therefore no doubt prophets existed during this time of transition between the old and new covenants.
- “*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Eph 4:11,12) Both apostles and prophets are mentioned by Paul as being ministers to the church.
- In my mind the most convincing proof-text is that which Paul says in the immediate context: “*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*” (Eph 3:5,6) Both the apostles and prophets are again mentioned by Paul but cannot be a reference to the OT prophets since this was a new revelation not given to those prophets of the OT

**IN WHAT WAY WERE THEY THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH AND BEARERS OF REVELATION? —** “How however could NT prophets ... be regarded as the foundation of the church or as bearers of revelation? 3.5 provides a clue for *it associates prophets with apostles in the transmission of the divine command to evangelise the Gentiles.* This command is given in variant forms and to groups whose membership is defined in different ways in Mt 28.16-20; Lk 24.47-9; Acts 1.8; Jn 20.21b. Since contemporary prophets gave directions about the future activity of the church it is not difficult to see how some might have thought of them as involved in the original command to evangelise, and if they were, they were involved in the admission of the Gentiles and thus in a decision about the shape of the church; they could then be considered alongside the apostles as its foundation. In Acts 13.1-3 prophets were involved in moving the church into a new venture; in doing so they were

shaping its nature.” [Best, 283] **“The apostles and prophets are foundational in the sense of being primary and authoritative recipients and proclaimers of revelation. The apostles were those with special authority from their commissioning by the risen Lord, while the prophets were those with charismatic authority. Some apostles, like Paul, were also prophets, but not all apostles were prophets, and certainly not all prophets were apostles. The apostles provided a foundational link with the risen Christ and, together with the prophets, gave foundational interpretation of what God had done in Christ for the edification of the Church.”** [Lincoln, 153] Therefore if we are to consider ourselves a NT church, our authority is and must be the Word of God not just as revealed in the OT but in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. This is what sets us apart from the Jewish faith of the OT. But these NT writings were all given by the apostles or those closely associated with the apostles (the non-Apostolic books are first of all Luke / Acts which were both written by Luke, but Luke was a close companion with the Apostle Paul. The other exception is the Gospel of Mark but John-Mark is considered by most Bible students to have been a close traveling companion of the Apostle Peter and therefore written under his influence. The author of Hebrews is unknown but quite possibly was the Paul himself.). That the Apostles were to transmit the teachings of Jesus on to His followers is a directive from our Lord Himself:

*“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”* (John 14:25,26)

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”* (John 15:26,27)

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”* (John 16:12-15)

*“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.”* (John 17:6-8)



**Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,** – ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, [ontos akrogōniāiou autou Christou Iēsou,]

**Note the emphatic ‘Christ Himself’, He and He alone is the cornerstone.** **“This clause ... serves to set off Christ both from the foundation of the apostles and prophets and from those who have been placed on that foundation.”** [Lincoln, 154] “Thus on the whole we take the image to be that of a vast stone at an angle of the substructure, into which the converging sides are imbedded, ‘in which’ they ‘consist;’ and the spiritual reality to be, that Jesus Christ Himself is that which gives coherence and fixity to the foundation doctrines of His Church; with the implied idea that He is the essential to the foundation.” [Moule, 84]

**IS JESUS THE ‘CORNERSTONE’ OR ‘CAPSTONE’? — cornerstone** – ἀκρογωνιαίου [akrogōniāiou] Isa 28:16 is the only place in the OT where this word is used; the word is unknown in classical Greek literature. “Current New Testament scholarship is divided as to whether the unusual word used here refers to the foundation stone (i.e., cornerstone) of the building or the crowning stone at the top of the edifice. In favour of the latter, it has been

claimed that, apart from evidence outside the New Testament, the exalted place accorded to Christ elsewhere in Ephesians (cf. 1:20-23; 2:6; 4:8-10) and his special position in relationship to the rest of the structure point to his being the crowning stone of the building. However, much of the extrabiblical material in favour of this interpretation is quite late, while the imagery of the cornerstone makes better sense in the immediate context, especially the relation of Christ to the apostles, and the picture of a growing and unfinished building. The preeminence, both in dignity and in time, accorded to Christ in the letter is enhanced, rather than diminished, by understanding this imagery of the cornerstone.” [O’Brien, 216f] Per O’Brien, the word is unknown in classical Greek literature and the only usage in the LXX OT is Isaiah 28:16 which also uses it in juxtaposition with ‘foundation’:

*“Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.”* (Isa 28:16 NKJV)

“The compound [akrogōniāios] occurs only in the LXX (first in Isa 28:16) and in the N.T. (here, 1Pe 2:6). [Lithos] (stone) is understood. Jesus had spoken of himself as the stone, rejected by the Jewish builders (experts), but chosen of God as the head of the corner (Mt 21:42), [eis kephalēn gōnias]. ‘The [akrogōniāios] here is the primary foundation-stone at the angle of the structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout’ (W. W. Lloyd).” [Robertson, Word Pictures] **“Two main interpretations have been offered of ἀκρογωνιαίου [akrogōniāios]: cornerstone,**

*capstone. Luke may have been aware of the word's ambiguity for in 20.18 people can both fall over the stone and it fall on them!"*

[Best, 284] Here is the verse referred to by Ernest Best:

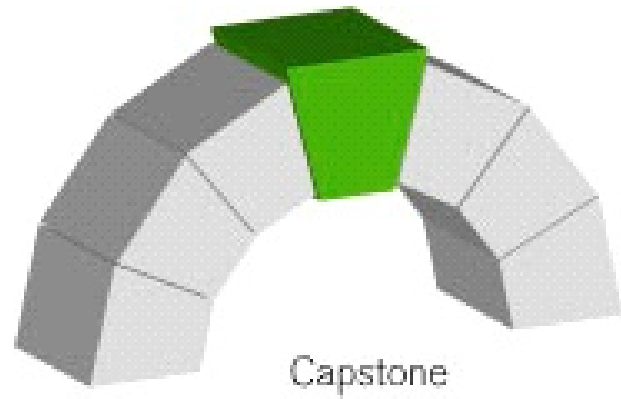
*"Then He looked at them and said, What then is this that is written: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."* (Luke 20:17, 18 NKJV)

For more on the differing views, see appendix A.

### **CHRIST AS A CAPSTONE FITS IN WELL WITH THE COMPLETED LOCAL ASSEMBLY (CHURCH) AS AN INSTITUTION**

— I find Ernest Best's comments interesting at this juncture. Best argues for the meaning of the word to imply a "capstone" rather than "cornerstone" yet has difficulties aligning

his view with the next verse. The problem is his universal church interpretation which is in the process of being built. But if the church is as yet incomplete, how can Christ be considered the capstone? This difficulty disappears if one takes a local church position and interprets v. 21 as the church *as an institution*. Ernest Best's comments: "However, this solution to the meaning of the angle-stone is difficult in that it implies that the building is well on to completion for in the next verse the growth of the church is stressed; buildings do not grow up to stones above them. Has Christ moreover no place in the church until it is partly complete? Yet there must be a sense in which the church is already complete, for v. 22 says it is God's dwelling-place; can he be envisaged as dwelling in an incomplete building?" [Best, 285f] I'm sure unknowingly but *Ernest Best's comments, definitely from a non-Baptist point-of-view, are strong arguments for a local church interpretation in this passage.* "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the (Greek, every) building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.' (Eph 2:20,21) ... The Ephesian letter was probably an encyclical, intended to circulate among several churches. Then 2:21 has greater meaning if 'all the' (Gk., pasa) of the King James version yields to the American Standard's 'each several building.' *This more accurate translation implies that Paul was not writing about one vast universal church, but rather about many distinct, individual, 'local' churches. Then each church, in every century and in every land, may claim the first church as its divine pattern.*" [S. E. Anderson, *The First Church*, pg 12f]



## **APPENDIX A: 'Cornerstone' or 'Capstone'**

**ANDREW LINCOLN: CAN SEE BOTH INTERPRETATIONS BUT PREFERS 'CORNERSTONE'** — *"Since Jeremias proposed that the cornerstone is in fact the final stone of the building, which was probably set over the gate, recent scholarship has been divided over whether ἀκρογωνιαίος [akrogōniaios] is to be taken as the foundation stone in the building or as the crowning stone or top stone of the edifice.* The evidence that can be adduced for the latter meaning is to be found in Ps 118:22 in Symmachus; LXX 2 Kings 25:17, where it is used for the head of a pillar; Hippolytus, *Elenchos* 5.7, 35; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 3.7; Aphraates, *Hom.* 1.6, 7; the Peshitta description of the stone of Isa 28:16 as the 'head of the wall,' and the *Testament of Solomon* 22.7-23.3, from the second or third century C.E., which depicts the completion of Solomon's temple as follows: 'Now the temple was being completed, and there was a great corner stone [λίθος ἀκρογωνιαίος μέγας, lithos akrogōniaios megas] which I wished to set as head of the corner by way of completing the temple of God ... and he went up the ladder carrying the stone and set it on the summit of the entrance to the temple.' The exalted position ascribed to Christ elsewhere in Ephesians and the special emphasis on Christ's position as over against the rest of the structure in 2:20 favor this interpretation. As S. Hanson puts it, 'He is not one of the stones in the foundation in common with the Apostles, even if He is a cornerstone, but He is the top stone of the pinnacle of the building.' *Against such an interpretation a number of objections can be made.* This usage is not found in LXX Isa 28:16 or quotations of it which identify ἀκρογωνιαίος [akrogōniaios] with the foundation stone, and in the Qumran writings there is a close association between the cornerstone and the foundation as Isa 28:16 is quoted.... Some of the evidence adduced for the top stone interpretation is of quite late date. It is also argued that the notion of Christ as the top stone is inconsistent with the dynamic imagery of a growing and unfinished building, and that it leaves the relation of Christ to the apostles and prophets unclear. Further, since the writer remains close to 1 Cor 3:10, 11 and Christ has a foundational role there, a similar position for him should be expected here. The cornerstone was placed first in the foundation and all the other stones in the foundation were lined up in accordance with it. Such an interpretation would make clear that the apostles and prophets have Christ as their norm. *The arguments are finely balanced. But some of these objections to the interpretation of Christ as the top stone can be rebutted.* For the writer of Ephesians, the notion of a finished structure with Christ as its head is not at all incompatible with the dynamic imagery of growth. He views the Church as already Christ's fullness (1:23) and yet at the same time as having to attain that fullness (4:13; cf. also 3:19). In 4:15, 16, the passage which repeats a number of the expressions found here in 2:20-22, the imagery is precisely that of a body growing up into Christ as the head. So here, on the one hand, the Church is pictured as a finished structure with Christ as the top stone, and yet, on the other hand, it must grow into a temple in him. On such a view, the relation of Christ to the apostles and prophets is not unclear. As in 4:7-16, they are in at the beginning of the Church, but Christ is the exalted Lord over all. They are foundational, but he is the keystone which crowns the whole building. *The crucial question in coming to an exegetical decision is whether we allow the LXX usage in Isa 28:16 and the Christological imagery of 1 Cor 3:11 or the writer's own perspective from elsewhere in this letter to be determinative.* The use of ἀκρογωνιαίος [akrogōniaios] here is

probably not a direct allusion to Isa 28:16 anyway, but an appropriation of the ‘stone’ *testimonia*, which were in fairly common use in the early church. In particular, Ps 118:22, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner,’ — had been seen as an appropriate expression of what God had done in exalting the crucified Jesus to be Lord of all. The rejected stone had become the keystone of the whole structure (cf. Mark 12:10; Acts 4:11). ***In Rom 9:32, 33 Paul employs a conflation of Isa 28:16 (which omits any reference to the cornerstone) and Isa 8:14, and elsewhere this conflation of Isaiah texts is combined with Ps 118:22 (cf. Luke 20:17, 18), and all three texts are linked in 1 Pet 2:6-8.*** Isa 28:16 had already, then, been combined with Ps 118:22 and thus with the notion of Christ’s elevation to the crowning stone of the building. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the writer of Ephesians has put elements from such a composite *testimonium* to his own use.... ***We have already noted that, while employing language from 1 Cor 3, the writer gives it his own distinctive twist, and once ‘foundation’ terminology is applied to the apostles and prophets instead of Christ, it would be natural for him to give Christ the exalted position attributed throughout the rest of his letter. The writer’s view of Christ as heavenly Lord and of the Church as growing toward him elsewhere in Ephesians should, therefore, be judged determinative for the use to which he has put traditional material here in 2:20.*** [Lincoln, 154ff]

**HAROLD HOEHNER: CORNERSTONE** — “Here it speaks of the cornerstone that is part of the foundation.... [I]n the history of Jewish interpretation of Isa 28:16, it has always been interpreted as ‘cornerstone’ and not ‘topstone.’ Whether or not Paul was thinking of this verse in Isaiah, the concept is the same, namely, a foundation with a cornerstone. Moreover, even Jeremias is forced to admit that in this one pre-Christian text (Isa 28:16) the word means ‘cornerstone.’ In the present context, the concept of ‘cornerstone’ is far better than ‘capstone.’

- First, it is true that Paul pictures Christ as the head of the church, but that is not under discussion here. Paul speaks about the foundation of the apostles and prophets and ‘Christ Jesus himself the cornerstone’ follows immediately. It is not likely that Paul would jump from the concept of a foundation directly to the concept of a final capstone. It is much more likely that he continues the picture of the foundation.
- Second, the previous context (2:14-18) portrays Christ as the beginning point of this new person, the church, rather than the finishing point. The cornerstone is the focal and beginning point of the foundation and the subsequent structure. Hence, the cornerstone is far more fitting to this portrayal than a capstone.
- Third, the immediate context (vv. 19-22) depicts the building as growing and not yet completed. It is improbable that Paul would introduce the idea of a final ‘capstone’ when the building is not yet completed.
- Fourth, although Paul uses the imagery of a building with a different purpose in 1 Cor 3:10-11, nevertheless he states there that he laid the foundation which is Christ, and this corresponds well with cornerstone in the present context. It would not correspond well with the concept of the capstone.
- Fifth, if Christ is the capstone, then Christ’s relationship with the apostle and prophets is unclear. However, if he is the cornerstone, then he is the main stone of the foundation and the apostles and prophets align with him.

What is the significance of a cornerstone? In today’s world the cornerstone is sometimes positioned into place at the time of the dedication of the building, after its construction is completed. That was not the case in ancient times. The cornerstone was the first stone laid. The builder was very careful to properly set this stone. Lloyd states, ‘The *acrogoniaios* here is the primary foundation-stone at the angle of structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout.’ In fact, in Isa 28:16 it is called a testing stone or literally ‘a stone of testing.’ It is that stone by which every other stone in the foundation and the superstructure must be measured. Thus, the building of the new person, the church, must be in conformity with the cornerstone, Christ Jesus.... The cornerstone was the most important stone in the whole building. All other stones were to be in line with it. Christ himself is the living cornerstone and the apostles and the prophets who make up the rest of the foundation needed to be correctly aligned with Christ. All succeeding believers are built on that foundation, causing their lives to be measured with Christ.” [Hoehner, 406f]

**ERNEST BEST: CAPSTONE** — “Two main interpretations have been offered of ἀκρογωνιαίος [*akrogōniaios*]: *cornerstone, capstone.* Luke may have been aware of the word’s ambiguity for in 20.18 people can both fall over the stone and it fall on them! ... This has led some to regard it as a stone at a corner which is used in squaring off the building. This would imply a unique position for Christ. But it cannot be proved that such stones existed for none has ever been discovered in ancient buildings of the Greco-Roman world. All that has been found are long stones which run along the foundation, one end of which may be at a corner, but these do not jut out for people to stumble over and in any building there are a number of them so that no one can be regarded as unique. The further suggestion that Christ as the cornerstone unites the two walls of Jewish and Gentile Christians is fanciful. If Christ is a stone in the foundation, even at the corner, does that distinguish him sufficiently from the apostles and prophets who also belong to the foundation? 1 Cor 3.10 makes clear Christ’s unique position for he alone is the foundation. If the apostles and prophets are regarded as laying the foundation some of the difficulties are avoided but we have seen that this is not what is meant. In Mk 12.10f; 1 Pet 2.6-8 it is easy to take Christ as cornerstone because neither passage refers to the foundation. It is these difficulties that have led to the acceptance of the alternative view of Christ as the capstone, the stone which locks an arch, not a dome, together. There are a number of instances of the use of the word where it implies a stone which is high above the ground: Isa 28.16 (Peshitta); 4 Kgdms 25.17; [et. al.]; the background to these references is the Jerusalem temple. If the readers would not have known enough about the temple in Jerusalem to pick up a reference to the ‘middle wall’ as the balustrade, would they have picked up this as a ‘high’ stone in it? Tertullian appears to think of a stone high in the building. Richardson suggests two possibilities from the temple at Didyma, and we can assume that if the readers did not know much about the architecture of the Jerusalem temple they would know something

about that at Didyma which was renowned in contemporary Asia Minor.... *A stone high in a building also accords with the idea of Christ as the head of his body, the church.*” [Best, 284f]

**F. F. BRUCE: CAPSTONE** — “[A]krogōniaios, so far as can be determined, does not mean a cornerstone, but a stone which crowns the building, like the ‘top stone’ of Zerubbabel’s temple, the last stone to be placed in position — placed in position by Zerubbabel himself, who had begun the work by laying the foundation stone (Zech 4:7, 9). While the Septuagint uses akrogōniaios only in Isa 28:16, the later Greek version of Symmachus uses it in 2 Kings 25:17 and again in Ps 118 (LXX 117):22, where it denotes the stone which has become ‘head of the corner’ — in other words, top of the pediment. Elsewhere in the NT the cornerstone of Isa 28:16 is combined with the once rejected stone of Ps 118 (LXX 117):22 (and also with the stone of stumbling of Isa 8:14-15) to form a composite testimonium (cf. 1 Pet 2:6-8). But here there is no conflation and no risk of confusing the foundation with the cornerstone: the apostles and prophets constitute the foundation, and Christ is the cornerstone.... On [akrogōniaios] the Patristic Greek Lexicon comments: ‘(stone) as topmost angle or point of pyramid, obelisk, etc., which being cut out before being set in position, and being last laid, would not fit if construction were not true.’” [Bruce, 306] Bruce also quotes approvingly of NEB’s translation of the Greek word as “*keystone*”, “a better rendering than foundation-stone”.

#### **OTHER LEXICON DEFINITIONS —**

- ἀκρογωνιαῖος, literally *lying at the extreme angle*; ἄ. (λίθος) *cornerstone; capstone*, the final stone placed at the top of a building structure to integrate it; figuratively, of the place of Christ in the believing community [Friberg Lexicon]
- ἀκρογωνιαῖος, the cornerstone or capstone of a building, essential to its construction — ‘cornerstone, important stone’ (ἀκρογωνιαῖος and κεφαλὴ γωνίας occur in the NT only figuratively in reference to Christ). ἀκρογωνιαῖος: ‘you, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself’ Eph 2.20. Some scholars have assumed that ἀκρογωνιαῖος would refer to the capstone occurring at the high point of a peaked roof, but in the NT ἀκρογωνιαῖος would probably refer to the type of stone which would have been used in the Temple in Jerusalem, and therefore it is far more likely to understand ἀκρογωνιαῖος as a cornerstone rather than a capstone of a peaked roof. It would not have referred to the keystone of an arch. Since, however, in many societies the use of ‘cornerstone’ is not known and in others it may have an entirely different function, it may be more satisfactory to use an expression such as ‘the most important stone’ or ‘the very important stone.’ This serves to describe the function and significance of the cornerstone without trying to indicate precisely its location or form. κεφαλὴ γωνίας: λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας ‘the stone which the builders rejected turned out to be the most important stone’ 1 Pe 2.7. Though some scholars have thought that κεφαλὴ γωνίας refers to a keystone of an arch or the lintel stone over a door, it is highly probable that κεφαλὴ γωνίας has essentially the same meaning as ἀκρογωνιαῖος [Louw-Nisa Lexicon]
- ἀκρογωνιαῖος — *at the extreme angle, the corner foundation-stone* [Liddell-Scott Lexicon]
- ἀκρογωνιαῖος, a word wholly Biblical and ecclesiastical (Winer’s Grammar) (ἄκρος extreme, and γωνία corner, angle), *placed at the extreme corner*; λίθος *cornerstone*; used of Christ, 1 Pet. 2:6; Eph. 2:20; the Septuagint Isa. 28:16 for  $\text{הַבֵּן הַבְּרִיט}$ . For as the cornerstone holds together two walls, so Christ joins together as Christians, into one body dedicated to God, those who were formerly Jews and Gentiles, Eph. 2:20 (yet cf. Meyer at the passage) compared with Eph. 2:14,16-19,21f And as a cornerstone contributes to sustain the edifice, but nevertheless some fall in going around the corner carelessly; so some are built up by the aid of Christ, while others stumbling at Christ perish, 1 Pet. 2:6-8. [Thayer’s Greek Lexicon] Note Thayer’s comments of the “cornerstone” holding together two walls, the picture being Christ holding together the Jewish / Gentile Christians in Eph 2:20.