

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:4-5

LIVING STONES

When I was a little girl, we had a rock garden in our front yard. I used to take one of the small rocks from the abundant supply. I would use it to draw a hopscotch diagram on the driveway. The rock's journey, however, didn't stop there. I would toss it into the diagram during the game, skip from one box to another, and then pick it up on the way back. When I finished the game for the day, I returned the rock to its place in the garden. It was practical, and it offered a function other than looking nice.

One thing I love about God is His practicality. There is a reason, a purpose, behind everything He does. God doesn't do something just for the sake of doing it. He has a plan for each one of us. Just as the rock garden had a purpose other than looking nice, we each have a purpose in God's kingdom. Of course, there are mysteries in Heaven that we have yet to understand. However, we can learn and grow in our understanding as we study Scripture.

Shema Yisrael

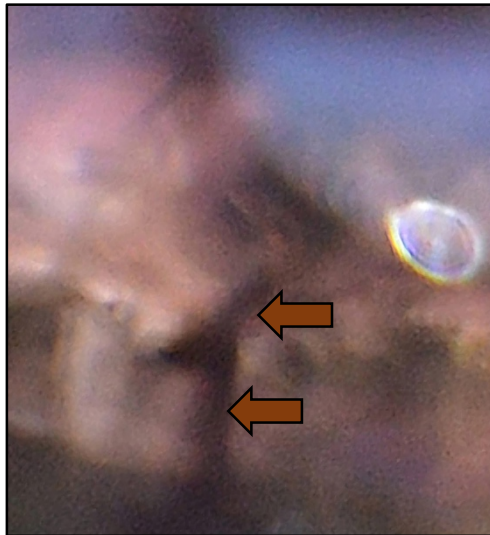
The *Shema* is the title of a prayer that is used in both morning and evening Jewish prayer services. *Shema Yisrael* translates to “Hear, [O] Israel.” In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, we read the beginning of this prayer. It says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

The commands given by the Lord to His people were intended to be a part of everyday life. They were designed to overflow from people’s hearts into practical living. Whether sitting at home, going for a walk, or lying down to rest, God’s commands were a part of a conversation, reflection, and instruction (vv. 6-7). The next two verses take it a step further. They say, “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (vv. 8-9). “Hands” may represent all that we do for the Lord, while the “forehead” may represent our thoughts toward Him. The “doorframes,” although earthly in this passage, may remind us of our heavenly home. For example, the twelve foundations of the Holy City will have the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb written on them (Revelation 21:14). And the twelve pearl gates will have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 12).

There is no life unless first touched by the hand of God. When the Lord has Moses tell Aaron to stretch out his staff

and strike the ground, the dust becomes gnats (Exodus 8:16-17). The magicians try to tell Pharaoh that it is the finger of God, but he chooses not to listen. His heart had become hardened (v. 19). This could have resulted from the sin of pride or even his failure to listen. As we will see in our study, there are consequences when we choose to ignore God and His ways.

In a different Bible story, Moses goes away to meet with God on Mount Sinai. The Israelites become impatient as they wait at the base of the mountain (Exodus 32:1). Meanwhile, the Lord gives Moses the Ten Commandments. The stone tablets, amazingly enough, were inscribed by the very finger of God (31:18). Exodus 32:16 says that “the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.” And, as we know, they were fulfilled by Jesus (Matthew 5:17). How wonderful is that? It is truly amazing!



*The Ten
Commandments were
placed inside the ark of
the covenant (Exodus
25:16).*

*And the “third” miracle
picture is to the left. The
long rectangular box
could represent the ark
with an open lid.*

Since the Israelites were unable to see Moses, their leader, they asked Aaron to make them gods they could see (Exodus 32:1). Spiritually speaking, it is very dangerous to seek after fulfilling the senses. A path like this will most likely lead to deception. It is important to note that I did not seek after the miraculous when I took the pictures. I was simply going about everyday life when the Lord chose to give them to me. Never in a million years would I, nor could I, have ever dreamed up something like this. They, too, were from the hand of God. If there is any message I would hope to leave you, it is this: Please take time to study the Word of God, not books or philosophies that happen to use (or misuse) a verse here or there. I mean really, truly search the Scriptures for yourself.

Okay, with that being said, let's return to the Bible story. Aaron tells the people to bring their gold earrings (v. 2). He takes the gold and makes it into "an idol cast in the shape of a calf" (v. 4). He also builds an altar in front of the golden calf (v. 5). The next day they have burnt offerings, fellowship offerings, and a festival (vv. 5-6). That's when the Lord sends Moses back to the Israelites (v. 7).

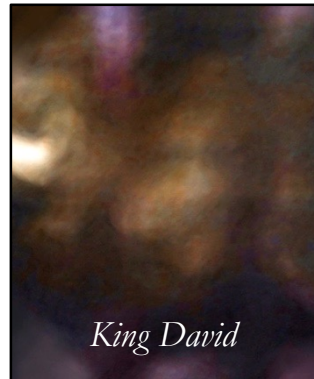
Whenever God's people take a wrong turn or make a wrong decision, God is always there to intervene. Whether they choose to listen, however, is up to them. In this situation, He uses the voice of Moses.

When Moses returns to the camp, he gets angry about the golden calf and all the dancing (v. 19). Moses throws the tablets, the Ten Commandments, and they break to pieces.

He also takes the golden calf, burns it in the fire, grinds it to powder, scatters it on the water, and makes the Israelites drink it (v. 20). Basically, he is saying, “If you want to worship something with no life whatsoever, if this is a part of you, only a carnal experience, well, then drink it.”

Thankfully, God cares so much about us that He has provided a way out of sin. The way, of course, is Jesus (John 14:6).

King David was very familiar with God’s forgiveness and love, as well as God’s greatness. In Psalm 8:3-4, David considers the universe, how in the midst of so many wondrous things, God still thinks of man. He says, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”



Before this section comes to a close, I have to take a moment to thank the Lord for His loving care. I am so grateful for His thoughts and plans for each one of us. May we be good stewards like Moses and King David. Thank You, Lord Jesus!

Circumcision of the Heart

I couldn't have asked for more suitable verses than what have been provided in Colossians 2 and 3. I invite you to read through both chapters at your leisure.

The apostle Paul encourages the church of Colossae to continue to live their lives in Christ Jesus (Colossians 2:6). He warns them to watch out for those teaching deceptive philosophy (v. 8). Paul then says, "In him [Jesus] you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands" (v. 11). This is "circumcision of the heart." In Romans 2:28-29, it sums up this kind of circumcision really well. The verses tell us that "a person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code."

One thing I love about the law is how it is written on our hearts (v. 15). The Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets by the finger of God. Our hearts, similarly, are like stone. However, when the life of God touches each heart by the Spirit, we become like living stones. The writing on our hearts is like circumcision. It is as if God cuts into stone tablets, spiritually speaking, of course. God knows our innermost thoughts, feelings, and intentions. It is His presence within the heart that allows us to love Him and others.

Deuteronomy 30:6 takes us back to the *Shema*. It says, "The

Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” True life flows out of a heart touched by God. It is not merely going through the motions of physical obedience, but rather a heart that longs to love God and His Word. Obedience will follow when a heart has been circumcised by the hand of God.

After Jesus arose from the dead, He appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus. They were talking about the death of the Lord and His empty tomb when “Jesus himself came up and walked along with them” (Luke 24:15). The King James Version says that “their eyes were holden that they should not know him” (v. 16). According to the Strong’s Concordance, the Greek word for “holden” is *krateo*. It means to “seize” or “retain.” Apparently, this was not the right time for the two men to recognize Jesus.

As they walked, the men told Jesus the details of what had happened, which included His work as a prophet and teacher, His crucifixion, their hope that He would redeem Israel, the women who went to the empty tomb early in the morning, and the two angels who spoke of Jesus’ resurrection (vv. 19-24). Jesus then explained “what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (v. 27).

The two men urged Jesus to stay with them since it was nearly evening (v. 29). When they sat at a table together, Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, and then gave it to the two men (v. 30). At that moment, their eyes were opened (v. 31). The Greek word for “opened” is *dianoigo*. It means

“to open thoroughly.” Luke uses this word in the next verse as well. Before we read it in two different translations, I have to say that I absolutely love this verse. Let’s begin with the King James Version. The men said one to another, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (v. 32). Then, in the New International Version, it says, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” I think this is an important verse for our study since it may help clarify the hidden manna and white stone. For example, the hidden manna represents Jesus, who is the living Word of God (John 1:14). And each white stone, I believe, represents a spiritual child of God. We are His living stones, white-hot and burning with love for Jesus and the Word.

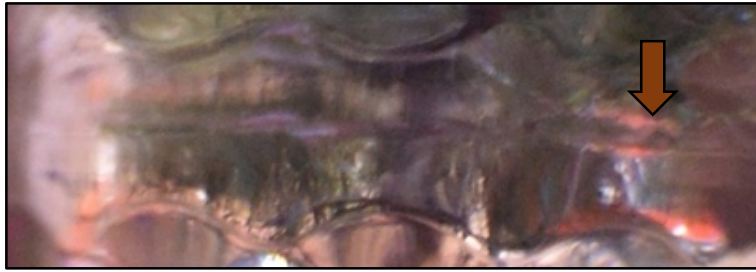
Altar of Incense

Let’s return for a moment to the priest with coals. As I look at the priest in the picture below, I think He resembles Jesus. In fact, if it is Him, then this picture represents the Great High Priest.

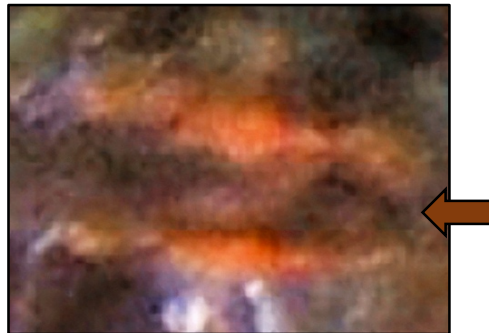
In Hebrews 8:1-2, it says that “we do have such a high priest...who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.”



It is interesting to note that there is a lamb on the altar of sacrifice. It looks like it has been slain (Revelation 5:6).



The lamb's dark face (right) makes up the priest's hair (left).



When we rotate the picture ninety degrees, the lamb is also a part of the Lord's legs.



*Just like the Passover lamb,
none of Jesus' bones were
broken (John 19:31-34).*

It is important to note that the coals for the altar of incense (left) needed to come from the altar of sacrifice (right). The King James Version says that Aaron “shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil” (Leviticus 16:12).



I believe the censer (left) represents the altar of incense in the two main pictures. Notice how the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense line up with one another. The Lord connects the two. Please note how Jesus’ body is lying down in between the two. It is as if the lamb’s shorter altar extends across, connecting to a longer altar for the Lord.

In *Looking Glass, The City God Loves*, I go into detail about the heavenly temple. For the sake of time, however, I will not be able to outline every detail in this study. I would like to point out, though, that the beloved disciple tells us he “did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22). He also says that “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (22:3). The heavenly altar, as well as the ark of the covenant, I believe, make up the throne of God. That is what we see in the picture above.

In the New Jerusalem, the coals will likely have a heavenly form. It is possible that they will be gemstones, perhaps the remains of our works tried by fire. As already noted, we will build with gold, silver, and costly stones (1 Corinthians 3:12). And one of those stones will probably be onyx.

I know this study requires a slight stretch of the imagination. In fact, I feel somewhat like a detective, attempting to piece together a beautiful hidden mystery. Please keep in mind that the following information is only a theory. I have done my best to interpret the pictures in light of Scripture. And since I do not have all the answers, nor all of Heaven's information, I will continue to try my best to connect the pieces.

White Stone

We now arrive at the white stone. So, what exactly is this stone? What is its purpose? These are questions I have attempted to answer during the last month or so. According to the Strong's Concordance, the Greek word for "stone" is *psephos*. It is "a pebble (as worn smooth by handling)." In the picture below, the High Priest has a white stone either in His hand or in a shovel.



The potter and clay suddenly come to mind. In Isaiah 64:8, the prophet says that “we are the clay, [and] you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Then, in Jeremiah 18:6, the Lord says, “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.”

When I was a little girl, I used to enjoy singing “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” I especially liked the part that says, “He’s got the itty bitty baby in His hands.” With everything that is happening in the world today, it is easy to question whether God has us in His hands. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the big picture, however, every now and then it is good to think about our individual lives. One can see his (or her) rough edges become smoothed out as the Great Potter handles his (or her) life, the earthly clay. And one day, when our earthly works are tried by fire, we will be left with heavenly stones, as well as gold and silver.

The Greek word for “stone” in Revelation 2:17 also speaks of “a verdict (of acquittal)” or “a ticket (of admission).” Some people like to think that the Lord is casting a white stone to declare us innocent like in an ancient courtroom. I’d like to add one more thought to this word study. It is as if He is admitting us, or allowing us, to have a voice at His altar. It could represent admission into Heaven, into His presence, where we will praise Him and serve Him forever.

If you haven’t already noticed, I like the Strong’s Concordance. Since I don’t speak Hebrew or Greek, this is a wonderful resource for me. You may like to use it too.

So, our next word is “white,” which is *leukos* in Greek. It comes from the Greek word *luke*, which means “light.” And *leukos* translates to “white.” Some people believe the glory of God will shine so brightly in the New Jerusalem that the stone will appear white. Others, however, tend to think that the stone will actually be white.

There is definitely something significant about the onyx stone. As already noted, it could have the color of a fingernail. This would go along perfectly with the idea that we are in the Lord’s hands. And since the onyx stone is used for making cameos, I have to imagine that it would be great for carving a new name. Perhaps the exterior will be white like the lower part of a fingernail. In fact, that part of the nail kind of looks like a white stone. When a new name is carved, perhaps it will have a skin-colored hue on the inside of it like a cameo. It’s just a fun thought. That color is also found in the upper part of a fingernail.

The colors of the fingernail remind me of circumcision of the heart. In Ezekiel 36:26, the Lord promises to restore Israel. He says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” This kind of heart is also called an “undivided heart” or “one heart” (11:19, KJV). We can see its purpose in the next verse where the Lord tells Israel, “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (36:27). Therefore, we can see from this illustration that a person will want to obey God when his or her heart changes from stone to flesh.

As we have learned, the high priest wore an onyx stone on each of his shoulders. And the breastplate of judgment had twelve different stones, one of which was onyx.

Interestingly enough, the breastplate was worn over Aaron's heart. And each stone was engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-20). The onyx stone was in the middle of the fourth row (v. 20).

In Deuteronomy 6:8, God's people are told to tie the commands as symbols on their hands and bind them on their foreheads. Then, in Revelation 22:4, the beloved disciple tells us that God's name will be in our foreheads (KJV), which is very similar to being mindful (or thoughtful) of who He is and what He has told us to do. I used to think that His name would be written on our clothing, such as a headpiece. Jesus, however, explains that He will write God's name, as well as His city, on those who overcome (3:12). His name will actually be in, or perhaps inside, our foreheads, similar to the writing on the stones or the gold plate on the high priest's turban (Exodus 28:36-37). That's not to say our clothing won't have some sort of representation of God and His holy city as well. I think we will see reminders of God in everything we wear, see, and do in His kingdom. In Hebrews 10:16, it says, "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." It is because of Jesus and His sacrifice that we can be faithful to all He is, all He represents, all He instructs, and all He commands. We should be thankful for His presence in each heart, soul, and deed.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming King and His kingdom. In Isaiah 9:6, it says, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder” (KJV). The next verse goes into detail about Jesus’ reign. It says, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever” (v. 7).

When I think about the onyx stones on the high priest’s shoulders, I am reminded of the Lord’s future millennial and eternal reign. A Hebrew word for “government” is *misrah*, which is found in Isaiah 9:6-7. It is important to note that this word is only used in these two verses.

Government, in general, is often considered a burden that one carries on his back or shoulders. God has governed all things from the beginning, but we will actually get to see Him as Ruler when He establishes His kingdom on earth. Then, one day, there will be a New Heaven and New Earth, as well as a New Jerusalem. The beloved disciple describes this transition into eternity beautifully. You may want to take a moment to read the last two chapters of Revelation.

Isaiah says that “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, KJV). It is possible that these names may be among those written on some of the white stones given to God’s people. Of course, the name could

also be a new one for the person. Perhaps it will say how God has affected the person's life. For example, the name may include the fruit of God's peace. It is interesting how the word "new" doesn't necessarily mean it has never existed before. According to the Strong's Concordance, the Greek word for "new" in Revelation 2:17 is *kainos*. Surprisingly enough, it means "new in freshness." The word "fresh" often means that something is "not stale," "sour," or "decayed." It can also mean that the original qualities are unimpaired. If we look at God's original intent for people, He wanted us to live holy and perfect lives in personal communion with Him. It is possible, therefore, that the name on the stone will be given with a fresh understanding, a holy perspective, or even a perfect purpose.

The beloved disciple says that God has made us to be kings and priests to serve Him in His kingdom (Revelation 1:6). Just as the tribes, the sons of Israel, had their names written on stones, so we will have a new name written on a stone as well. This stone, I believe, will ultimately find a place at the altar of incense. I do think, however, that it may have another function.

Beaten

I would like to return to Leviticus 16:12 for a moment. On the Day of Atonement, Aaron would "take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord..." (KJV). The coals were then placed at the altar of incense

(v. 13). Without a sacrifice, one could not move ahead in worship. The sacrifice would come first, so that the person (the priest) could enter God's presence. What I find fascinating is how Aaron was told to take two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small (v. 12). The New International Version calls it "finely ground." This incense, along with the coals, worked together. They were a part of the process to enter the most holy place.

As we have already learned, the Israelites became impatient in the wilderness. First, they grumbled since Moses was gone so long. Then, they wanted a false god to worship. When Moses returned, he ground up their idol and made them drink it. Obviously, the Israelites' behavior is the opposite of God's plan for us. Instead, we should be thankful for His plan of redemption and worship only Him.

When the Israelites gathered the manna, they "ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar" (Numbers 11:8). The King James Version says that they "beat it in a mortar." I am sure you are beginning to see the direction we are heading.

I believe there is something significant about grinding manna or incense down to its smallest form. I think it has to do with the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf. Every sin, every evil thought or desire, was taken by the Lord Jesus for us. Second Corinthians 5:21 tells us that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we

might become the righteousness of God.”

The word “smote” in Mark 15:19 means “repeated blows,” which is similar to the idea of grinding or beating the incense. Let’s go ahead and read this verse in the King James Version. It tells us that “they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.”

It is heartbreaking to think of all the humiliation and pain the Lord went through for you and me. When Jesus was sentenced to be crucified, the soldiers made fun of Him. They twisted together a crown of thorns for His head and clothed Him in a purple robe (Mark 15:17; John 19:2). In Isaiah 53:4-5, the prophet says, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (KJV).

One day, when we receive the hidden manna and white stone, we will remember the great price Jesus paid for each one of us. Within the hidden manna, we remember the perfect sacrifice, the Lord Jesus who hung on a tree. We also remember His life-giving presence through the tree of life.

Everything we need to serve the Lord in His kingdom will be provided through Him and by Him. For example, I believe the hidden manna will come from the tree of life.

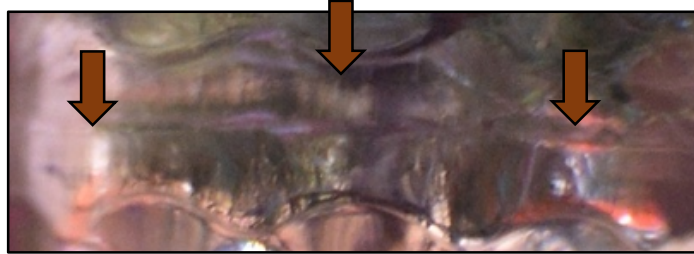
We will definitely take a closer look at this part of the Lord in chapter three.

As we grind the hidden manna with our white stone, we will remember Jesus' body, how it was beaten on our behalf. Then, we will continue through the Holy City to the altar of incense. Each one of us, I think, will place our white stone at this altar, which could be in front of the throne (Revelation 8:3). Romans 12:11 suddenly comes to mind. It says, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." As the fire continues to burn before the Lord, the white-hot stones from the altar of sacrifice will be a constant reminder of our love for Jesus and His great sacrifice. And they will continue to burn in worship at the altar of incense forevermore. This is my very humble interpretation and theory.



When I saw the picture above and compared it to Scripture, I was a little confused by the order. Genesis 2:12 says that there is gold, bdellium, and onyx (KJV). Then, in Revelation 2:17, we read about hidden manna and a white stone. The order is clear to me now. The hidden manna, which has the color of bdellium, comes before the stone (in the list) because of Jesus' sacrifice. His sacrifice has to come first. Then, we can worship and serve Him with the white stone, which I think is the onyx stone.

Here is another way to look at it. In order to worship the Lord, which is represented by the (1) gold censer, there has to be a sacrifice. Directly above the (2) bdellium is the Lord Jesus lying down on the extended altar. This is the sacrifice, which He made once for all (Hebrews 10:10). Remember, we are looking at the heavenly tabernacle, not the earthly one. Then, we can worship Him through service. This is the (3) onyx stone.

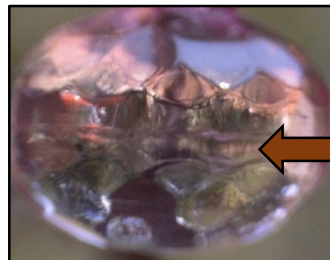


Spiritual House

The apostle Paul sums up this chapter very well. He says “you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Let’s take a look at the picture of the New Jerusalem from the east side. The Lord is clearly in the foundation. He, of course, is the chief cornerstone.

And everything in God’s kingdom will be built upon Jesus and His sacrifice.



I believe what remains of our earthly works after tried by fire (the gold, silver, and costly stones) will be used to build on the foundation already laid. It will be extremely beautiful!

In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ. We are all children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus (v. 26). While I was writing *Looking Glass, The City God Loves*, I learned a few things about the tribe of Benjamin. For the first time, I wondered if I may have Jewish roots. It had never crossed my mind before. I know my great-grandparents came from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Ireland. I was raised in Minnesota where Scandinavian traditions are celebrated. I am grateful for my Christian upbringing. I am also grateful to have been grafted into God's family tree and that He has circumcised my heart. I celebrate having a place in His kingdom.

I do wonder, however, why I love to study God's temple so much. I love Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem more than any earthly city. I have to wonder, why do I have a good shot in archery? Or why can I use my left side as well as my right? Why do I have quick reflexes and can catch random things as they fall? Why does my light brown hair have so much red in it? Months ago, as I studied the tribe of Benjamin, I felt like I was reading a few things about myself. Could I have come from this tribe? I'm not much of a warrior, but I do like to pray.

So, I have decided to take a test to learn more about my heritage. Whatever I find out, at least I will always know that I am forever His.