

greatness and righteousness and goodness of Jehovah -- his fortress when evil and wicked men attack.

We of modern cities, far from the rocky hills of Palestine, may not fully appreciate the meaningful image of "rocky hills" and "clefts" and "caves" in rocks. But they served as secure strongholds when ancient people were forced to flee from their homes and cities before marauding armies.

Jehovah, the "Rock of Israel," is also the citadel of protection in whom we place our trust and hope. It is He that promises: "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5) -- the promise He offered Israel on the plains of Moab before Joshua led them into the land of promise (Deut. 31:6).

As the biblical fathers of faith, men today who honor, trust, and serve God never stand alone in the presence of evil. Noah and his family, amidst a perverse world of evil men, were empowered by faith to persevere and, as a result, found protection and security in God (Gen. 6-9; Heb. 11:7).

Daniel and his fellow Hebrews, alone in the palace of a king surrounded by envious and evil men, found the safety of refuge in the overruling power of Jehovah (Dan. 1-6). Paul, though forsaken by men at his trial before the emperor of Rome, found strength in the Lord who stood by to grant him boldness and deliverance (2 Tim. 4:16,17). God, the Rock of Israel, is not dead. His power has not weakened through the ages, and His gracious and merciful gift of help is now offered to His people

in Christ Jesus (Heb. 4:16-18).

As the songwriter, S.S. Journal, so eloquently put it:

Some build their hopes on the ever-drifting sand, Some on their treasure or their land;

Mine's on the Rock that forever shall stand, Jesus the "Rock of Ages."

In conclusion he writes:

That Rock's a tower, whose lofty heights, Illumed with heav'n's unclouded light,

Ope's wide its gates beneath the dome, Where saints find rest in Christ at home. ~

L.A. Stauffer in Biblical Insights, Vol. 8, No. 1, Jan. 2008

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What Did God "Establish"?

World scholars seem to agree that the church was established in Jerusalem, the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. Acts 2: gives the record, and only a few with some creed to defend offer objection. But WHAT was established when the church was established? Foolish question?? Well, read Acts 2: carefully.

Any "dedication" services? "Chairman" appointed? Any of the "institutional" procedure one would expect if today's common conception of "church" were cor-



Today the emphasis is upon the party—the church is something like a lodge, or "Royal Order of Saints"—a society, somehow related to certain buildings. This conception is missing in God's record of establishment.

Prophecies concerning the establishment of the church invariably refer to the relationship, or the basis for the relationship, between God and individuals. Isaiah says, "the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains---" referring to the establishment of God's law for all nations. (Isa. 2:1-f.) The promised kingdom was a promise of peace according to divine government. (Isa.9:1-f) The ransomed of Jehovah would walk in "The Way of Holiness." (Isa. 35:8ff)

rect? It just isn't there.

Little Red Wagon
It seems many think of the church

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as something like a little red wagon. "Established on Pentecost" -- it stood ready to roll, and people could jump in and ride to heaven. But somewhere along the line a side-rail broke, an axle was bent, the tongue came loose, and finally a wheel fell away. Luther tried to put the wheel back on, but further bent the axle in his effort. Others replaced the tongue with a new but different instrument -- unsuited to the purpose and function of the original tongue. Alas, the church was broken down and out of service.

Then A. Campbell and Barton Stone determined to restore the church. They straightened the axle, replaced the tongue with an original model, repaired the side-rail and put the wheel back in place. Now people could again ride home to heaven.

Have I stretched the picture? Perhaps—but only to emphasize what I believe to be an entirely erroneous conception of the church established on Pentecost. This is a denominational concept. It glorifies the "party" and does not properly distinguish between faithful and unfaithful people.

WHO are The Church??

The word "church" is a collective noun, and it "collects" people. But not just any people. Christ's church consists of "Saints and faithful brethren," "a people for God's own possession." (Col. 1:2 1 Pet. 2:9) Of all the multitude gathered in Jerusalem, only those who "gladly received his word" and "were baptized" became members of the church. (Acts 2:41)

Members of the church do sin, but they are expected to repent and pray God for forgiveness. Failing to do this, they are denied the fellowship of Christians. (1 Cor. 5:) A congregation of Christians who, collectively, no longer act in keeping with God's will is unworthy of a name and place among the churches of Christ. (Rev. 2) The Lord's church consists of people identified with the truth -- not just a people identified with a party.

God's Establishment Unchanged

What God established -- truth -- the New Covenant -- never changes. (1 Pet. 1:23-f) But the party -- the people could fall away. (1 Tim. 4:1-f) First their attitude toward divine authority is

altered, then their practices, then, usually many years later, their terminology. Because the rule is one thing, and the people who supposedly follow the rule is another, Paul said we must not measure ourselves by our selves. (2 Cor. 10:12-f)

One may "stay with the building" "stay with the preacher" "stay with the elders" "stay with 90% of the people" -- and yet leave the church which God established. In fact, this is precisely the history of denominationalism with its creed-bound people.

Christians today need to restudy their conception of Christ's church. We must rededicate ourselves, not to some "party" but to the Christ, and to His cause. I must know the truth, and obey it, regardless of the action of others--"in the church" or out of it. I must remember that it is the purified and cleansed church-- not the "party"-- that Christ promises to save eternally. (Eph. 5:26-27) What God really established is firm and sure, and cannot be shaken. Heb. 10:28 ~

Robert F. Turner, Plain Talk, vol. 1, p. 4—January, 1964



Photo of modern Bethlehem taken from across the valley in a rural sheep grazing area.

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" Luke 2.8-11

Psalm 71: An Old Man's Prayer

When The American Standard Version Of The Bible attached summary statements to individual Psalms, the translators entitled Psalm 71: "Prayer of an Old Man for Deliverance." The content of the Psalm shows that its writer had every reason to speak of the "righteousness of God all day long" (vs. 24). The Lord had in his lifetime put to shame his enemies and confounded those who sought to do him harm. He now writes a hymn that combines a call for deliverance and rescue with the promise to sing praises to God and to continue to proclaim His righteousness.

Trust And Hope: -- The Psalm is, first of all, a hymn of trust and hope. The writer's trust is not in the shifting sands of his own strength or wisdom, but in the secure and invincible power and faithfulness of Jehovah. "In Thee, O Jehovah, do I take refuge," he begins. "Thou art my rock and my fortress," he adds. It is his faith that speaks to God for ongoing security: "Be Thou to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." His confidence rests on a lifetime of help from God: "For Thou art my hope, O Lord Jehovah: Thou art my trust from my youth" (vss. 1-5).

The psalmist, undoubtedly, recalls the stability of Jehovah, as the "Rock of Israel" that had delivered his nation from Egyptian bondage, had borne them on eagles' wings in the wilderness of Sinai, and had led the warring nation into the land that He had promised to their father, Abraham (2 Sam. 23:3; Exo. 19:1-6; Jos.

21:43-45). This is the immutable God who had supported the psalmist from the time he was taken from his mother's womb (vs. 6). Jehovah had always been there for him and he now trusts Him to be his refuge in his present danger.

Wicked And Cruel Men: -- The words of the psalm are set in a time when the writer faced his latter days -- the days "when I am old and gray headed" (vss. 9,18). In these waning days "the hand of the wicked and the hand of the unrighteous and cruel men threaten him" (vs. 4). Israel had been called by God and was separated from "the nations" to be a special people -- a holy nation and a kingdom of priests devoted to God. Conquering and occupying the land of heathen nations was fraught with challenges from adversarial and evil men. It wasn't unusual for the heathen to taunt them for their devotion to God and the very God in whom they trusted.

The aging songwriter now faced those circumstances: "For mine enemies speak concerning me; And they that watch for my soul take counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken him: Pursue and take him; for there is none to deliver" (vss. 10,11). His adversaries see him as weak and helpless before His God. They are ready to pounce and the psalmist makes no pretence of securing victory by his own strength.

Plea And Cry: -- The plea of the troubled writer is a cry for help: "Deliver me in Thy righteousness,

and rescue me: Bow down thine ear unto me, and save me" (vs. 2). "Rescue me, O my God," he pleads. "Be Thou to me a rock of habitation"; "Cast me not off in the time of my old age"; "Forsake me not when my strength faileth"; "O, my God, make haste to help me"; "Let them be put to shame and consumed that are adversaries to my soul"; "Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor that seek my hurt" (vss. 3,4,9,12,13).

"There stands a rock," in the words of the modern lyricist, is a common metaphor among Israelites to denote safety and stability. To dwell in the "clefts of the rock" is to possess the security of a fortress -- and impenetrable place of refuge. "Who can bring me down from thence?" the Edomites challenged from their setting in the rock city of Petra, where they had mounted on high as eagles (Obad. 3). "Jehovah" is the answer to Edom's challenge. He will bring them down, but by that same power He is the rock of security that the psalmist trusts and exalts.

Praise And Joy: -- The psalmist promises to praise Jehovah "yet more and more," to declare his "strength to the next generation" and His "might to everyone that is to come." "I will praise Thee with the psaltery," he writes; "unto Thee will I sing praises with the harp"; "My lips shall shout for joy when I sing praises to Thee"; "My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long" (vss. 14-16,18,22-24). All of this the writer promises because of the