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**"The Stone  
that will fall  
from Heaven"**

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**Notes of an Address  
by  
H. A. IRONSIDE**



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“Jesus saith unto them, did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matt. 21:42-44).

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**Y**OU will remember the context of these verses. Our blessed Lord, who had already foretold His rejection by Israel and solemnly prophesied His death and resurrection, related the parable of the householder and the vineyard in the hearing of the Pharisees and the chief priests. It is a parable easily read

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and understood in the light of the kindred passage in Isaiah 5 and the striking reference in Psalm 80: 8. The vineyard is the land of Palestine, and the vine God's earthly people Israel. This vine, brought out of Egypt, had been planted in Jehovah's fruitful hill. He had hedged it round about, digged a wine-press in it, built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and gone into a far country. All this spoke of His fostering care of Israel, hedged about by His holy law and dowered with the most blessed divinely-given privileges, such as no other people had ever enjoyed both from a national and a spiritual standpoint. Their nurture was entrusted to divinely-appointed leaders, both kingly and priestly in character, while He Himself, who had been so marvelously manifested in the beginning of their history, withdrew as it were into the silence. He had gone into the far country, shut away from their view in the heaven of heavens, though still deeply concerned about His people in the earth. From time to time He sent His prophets,

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His own personal representatives, to receive the fruit of the vineyard; that is, to see what there was in Israel that He could delight in—what this vine of the Lord’s planting was producing for Himself. But these servants were beaten, stoned, killed, and that at times in the most cruel manner, as when Isaiah was sawn asunder and Zechariah slain between the porch and the altar. Last of all, He sent unto them His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, “They will reverence my Son,” or as another Gospel puts it, “It may be they will reverence Him when they see Him,” but alas when He came full of grace and truth they had neither eyes to see, ears to hear, nor hearts to understand, but they cried, “This is the heir; come, let us kill Him and let us seize on his inheritance.” And so they caught Him and cast Him out of the vineyard and slew Him. It was a forecast of the treatment they were about to accord to God’s beloved Son, but those to whom our Saviour was speaking did not for the moment recognize Him as the heir who was

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rejected, and so when the Lord put the straight question to them, "When the master of the vineyard cometh, what will he do with those husbandmen?" they *condemned themselves*, though they realized it not, as they answered, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen which will render him the fruits in their seasons." Then with crushing force Jesus turned to their own Scriptures and from three different Old Testament portions He brought out to them their own sin and doom, until at last we read that they perceived that He spake of them, and they would have laid hands on Him on the spot but they feared the people who took Him for a prophet. They did not rest, however, until they saw Him nailed to a Roman cross, thus fulfilling their own part in the parable.

In the 42nd verse our Lord quotes from Psalm 118: 22, 23. This Psalm is one of those commonly designated "Orphan Psalms," in that it has no heading telling us who the human author

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might be. It is not necessary to suppose that it was written by David nor during his life-time. It is the last of the little Hall-El, or, as it is sometimes called, the Egyptian Hall-El, which was sung at the celebration of the Passover, and in all likelihood was on the lips of our Lord and His apostles after the institution of the Lord's Supper, when as we read, “They sang a hymn and went out.” The Psalms were not assembled in their present order and number until a much later period than that of David, for we know there are some Post-Exilic Psalms included, particularly among the Psalms of Degrees, beginning with Psalm 120. According to Jewish tradition, Psalm 118 was written about the time of the completion of Solomon's temple and may even have been sung at its dedication.

There is a very striking and beautiful story linked with these verses quoted by our Lord. It is said that they have reference to something that occurred during the building of the temple. It will be remembered that Solomon was seven years

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in constructing this glorious sanctuary, and that he had many thousands of workmen who labored six months at a time and then were superseded by others, consequently very few who were in the early relays were engaged upon the building when it was about to be completed. From the book of Kings we learn that the stones for the temple were all hewn and cut to order in the quarry before being sent up to the great platform on the top of Mt. Moriah where the temple stood. There was no tool or hammer used in the building and the great structure went up in silence. In this it marvelously pictured God's present temple, builded of living stones, quarried out from the pits of sin and builded together for an habitation of God in the Spirit.

"View the vast building, see it rise!  
The work how great, the plan how wise!  
Oh, wondrous fabric; power unknown,  
That rears it on the living stone!"

The Jews say that these stones were practically all of the same size and shape but that



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one stone was sent up which was so different from the rest that they were at a loss what to do with it. It did not seem to fit anywhere. After consultation they decided a mistake had been made, and so they placed it upon rollers and pushed it over to the edge of Mt. Moriah and tumbled it down into the vale below. "The stone that the builders rejected!" But as the time went on the temple was nearing completion the day drew near for the placing of the chief corner-stone. There was nothing suitable on the platform. Word was sent down to the quarrymen to send up this corner-stone as they were now ready for it, but the answer came back, "We sent it to you long ago; you must have it there upon the temple site." But a thorough search failed to reveal it. Then an old workman said, "I remember now there was a stone sent up when we first began to build, but we saw no place for it and we hurled it down into the abyss. Go down below and you will find it." And so they sent a searching-party and eventually discovered

it almost covered up with debris and overgrown with moss. They raised it with great effort to the platform above and found it fitted exactly in the place prepared for it. Thus the rejected stone became the head of the corner. Now our Lord applies all this to Himself. He came unto His own but His own received Him not. They did not realize who He was, and so they fulfilled their own Scriptures in rejecting Him. The Apostle solemnly charged them after the day of Pentecost concerning this, saying: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," but, he adds, "God raised Him from the dead." And in 1 Peter 2: 4 we read, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious." This is indeed the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

I think it is most striking the way the 24th verse of Psalm 118 comes in here, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice

and be glad in it.” It is the resurrection day, the day our Saviour triumphed over death, the day when the rejected stone became the head of the corner, that the Psalmist has in view. Surely this is indeed the Lord’s Day referred to in Revelation 1, and it is not, as some have supposed, that John was caught away in the Spirit unto the Day of the Lord—a supposition which only does violence to the context and which would tend to rob the Christian of the preciousness and the privileges of the first day of the week, the memorial of the resurrection.

In Matthew 21:44 our Lord refers to two other Old Testament passages which speak of this stone and applies both to Himself. In Isaiah 8:14,15 we read, “And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” And so He says, “Whosoever shall fall on this

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stone shall be broken." He is speaking prophetically of Israel. To them He was a stumbling-stone and a rock of offence, and they stumbled over Him and were broken to pieces. He was not at all a Messiah to their tastes. They looked for a mighty warrior, a worldly king who would triumph by human methods, backed by divine power, over all their adversaries. But in place of a great world conqueror,

"He came a little baby thing  
That made a woman cry,"

as George McDonald so strikingly puts it. They could not see in the Babe of Bethlehem the mighty avenger of Israel, long before depicted in Isaiah's fervid phrases and set forth similarly by other prophets. And so they gave Him into the hands of the Gentiles and cried, "Away with Him; crucify Him, crucify Him." When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" they sealed their own doom when they exclaimed, "We have no king but Cæsar," and then by a fearful male-

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diction invoked His blood upon themselves and their children. And so in accordance with Daniel's prophecy, Messiah was cut off and had nothing. But in cutting Him off they cut themselves off and the ancient prediction of Moses was fulfilled, their city and temple destroyed, millions slain, and the rest scattered among all the nations of the world. Ask a Jew, “What is the greatest sin your nation can possibly commit?” He will tell you, if he is an orthodox Jew, “It is the sin of idolatry. Because of this sin, God drove our fathers from our land and gave them into the power of the Gentiles for seventy years, and only permitted them to return to Palestine when the demon of idolatry had been cast out.” But the Jewish nation has never been idolatrous since the return from Babylon. Why are they not in their land to-day? What sin did they commit 1900 years ago because of which they have been wanderers among the Gentiles for nearly two millenniums? It was the rejection of Christ. He was the stone of

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salvation, but they stumbled over Him, and they have been broken to pieces.

But our Lord adds, "On whosoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder." Now the reference is clearly to the smiting stone of Daniel 2, the stone that will fall from heaven upon the feet of the image of Gentile power, and will destroy all the kingdoms of the nations, which will be superseded by the kingdom of God filling the whole earth. Observe when our Lord came the first time he was the stumbling-stone, not the stone falling from heaven. It is to His Second Coming the latter passage refers. After the Gentile dominions have run their course, He will come in the days of the last great world-confederacy and will set up a kingdom never to be destroyed. In the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in the night watches, and also by the prophet Daniel, the head of gold is shown to represent Babylon; the breast and arms of silver set forth the Medo-Persian dominion which destroyed the Babylonians; the body and thighs

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pictured the Græco-Macedonian Empire which overturned the Persian; the legs of iron represent the Roman Empire under which our Lord was born as the Virgin's son. Under this Empire He was crucified. It continued in existence for some hundreds of years after His resurrection until destroyed by the barbarians in the 4th and 5th centuries of our era, but this leaves the feet of the image yet to appear. The feet were composed of iron and clay; they represent the last stage of Gentile Government, the iron of imperialism mixed with the miry clay, or brittle pottery, of social democracy. We see this condition prevailing at the present time, but still the stone has not fallen from heaven. The ten toes represent ten kings or dominions which are to appear in the last days and will form a great confederacy, all springing out of the old Roman Empire. When this confederacy is actually formed the people who are then living upon the earth may know that the day of the smiting stone is at hand, for Daniel says, “In the days of those

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kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." It is then that our Lord will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel. It is then that the ungodly nations will prove how true were the words of our Lord, "On whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder."

Ere that time comes He has made provision to snatch away His Church from the impending wrath. He will descend from heaven with a shout, we are told, "with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be forever with the Lord." When the stone falls from heaven His saints will shine forth in the same glory with Himself, He will come with all His holy ones to execute judgment on all ungodliness and will establish the long predicted Messianic Kingdom. Then Israel will

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look upon Him whom they have pierced, and will mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and as one who is in bitterness for his first-born. Then a nation shall be born in a day, and long years of travel and wandering among the Gentiles will be ended and the kingdom established, given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof—regenerated Israel.

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