

Built on the Rock



In a recent documentary about architecture, I was fascinated by the differences between New York and London. Both are major world financial and trade centres, both have many millions of inhabitants; but their skylines are different. New York's profile – particularly Manhattan – is a mass of skyscrapers, some over 400 metres high. London has some tall buildings, but many fewer and not to the same grand heights as its American cousin. The highest building in London is 'The Shard' at just over 310 metres.

The reason for this is their differing bedrocks. Manhattan is comprised of very hard 'schist', which is close to the surface and can be seen in the boulders in Central Park. This makes it comparatively easy to build very tall buildings which are stable, despite their huge weight.

In London, however, softer sedimentary rocks lie under the city, with clay and chalk in the rock layers. This means that building upwards is challenging, as the foundations have to be dug very deep indeed, and may still require additional structures to make them secure.

In each case, the strength and resilience of the buildings is depend-

ent on their foundations, and the material on which they are built.

A Common Concept

This architectural principle is one with which we are familiar in other areas of life. In science, we start with established facts which act as solid basic foundation. When learning a language, we first establish the simplest words and phrases, get them right, and then build more sophisticated structures. In any sport, players begin by learning the rules, developing their basic fitness and then progress to tactics and game-play.

The same applies in our everyday lives. Whether we consider our relationships, careers or other interests, we know that it is right to get the foundations right and to develop from there. If we do not, then we will eventually fail in whatever we are trying to do. More importantly, building on the right foundation is critical to our spiritual lives, to the way in which we construct our relationship with God.

Jesus told the well-known parable about two men who built houses on different foundations. The first was successful:



Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24–25).

The second, however, was a failure once put to the test:

But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (v26–27).

Spot the Difference

Let's think about these two houses. There is no suggestion that the first was better built, or looked better. Jesus did not suggest that the intentions of the first builder were different – both were building houses which we assume they wanted to be stable and survive the weather. The difference was the base on which they were built.

This teaches us something valuable about the basis for our lives. Our intentions may be good, we may put in lots of effort and we may live 'good' lives; but if we start from the wrong point, we will still fail. If we want to have a rela-

tionship with God and be in His kingdom, we have to go about it in the right way.

Many people today will argue that it doesn't matter how we live, so long as we 'try our best'. It is true that we should try as hard as we can to do the right things, but we have to do so in the right way, on the basis that God has established.

The Solid Foundation

Jesus told us what it means to build on a rock – it is to hear what he says, and to do what he asks. The man who built on the sand heard Jesus' words but failed to put them into practice.

So, we have two stages – firstly, to hear the words of Jesus. Two thousand years after Jesus was preaching in Israel, we are privileged to have his words written down for us. Not only this, but we have all of the Bible, which contains God's message, with Jesus' teachings at its core. There is nothing stopping us reading it, 'soaking up' its words and starting from the right place in building our lives.

It is a good idea to use a Bible Reading Planner to help us, such as the one on pages 10–11. If we follow this one, we will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year.

Then we have the stage of doing what Jesus asks. It means acting on what we have learned, showing faith, being baptized and trying to follow his example, such as helping those in need, being kind and thoughtful, and sharing the Bible message with other people.

Why not read Jesus' words for yourself, and start building a better future?

Editor