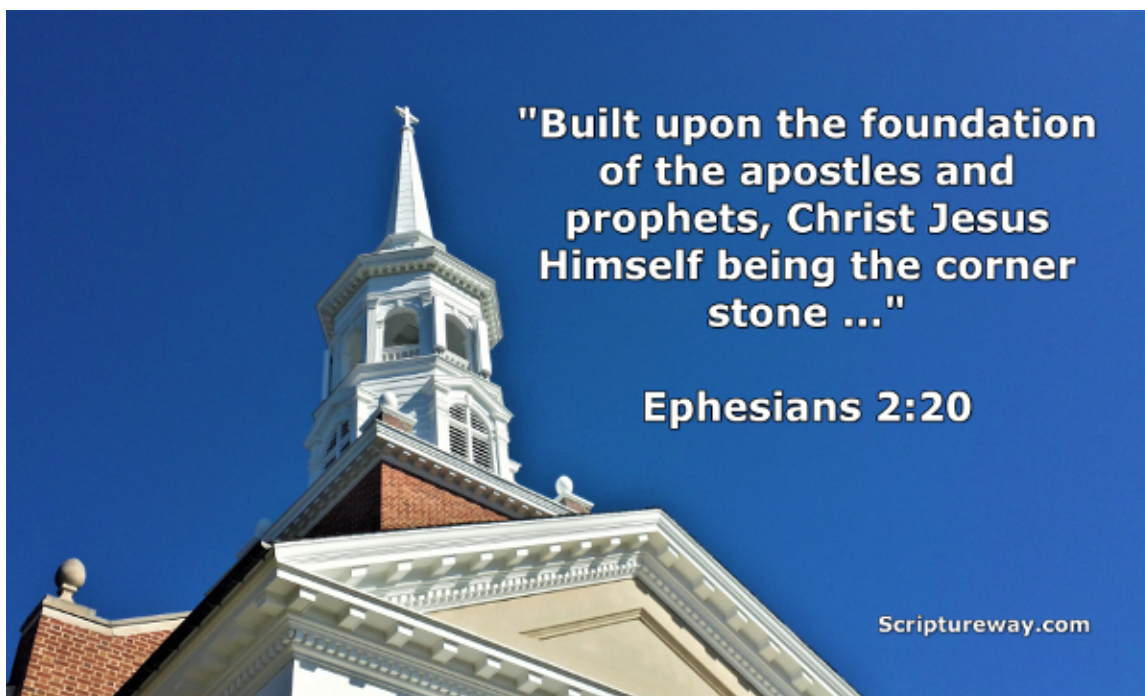


# “Christ is Made the Sure Foundation – Hymn Story and Biblical Allusions”

31 March 2022

by Mr. Whitney V. Myers



Christ the Foundation and Corner Stone - Ephesians 2:20 - Church of the Abiding Presence, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania USA - Photo by Whitney V. Myers

***"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord ..." (Ephesians 2:19-21)***

This lesson provides the hymn story and principal biblical allusions for "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation" written by John Mason Neale.

(continued next page)

**Consider.** Consider these words translated from 7th century Latin:

"Christ is made the sure foundation,  
Christ the head and cornerstone;  
chosen of the Lord and precious,  
binding all the church in one;  
holy Zion's help forever,  
and her confidence alone."

-- John Mason Neale ([Ref. 1](#), [Ref. 2](#), [Ref. 3](#) below)

## Hymn Writer



John Mason Neale (1818-1866)  
([Ref. 4](#))

**John Mason Neale** (1818-1866) was an English Anglican priest, scholar, and hymn writer ([Ref. 4](#)). Neale is best known as a hymn writer and translator, having enriched English hymnody with many ancient and medieval hymns translated from Latin and Greek ([Ref. 4](#)). Neale's best-known translations of hymns and Christmas songs include: "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," "Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain," "Of the Father's Love Begotten," "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation," "Good Christian Men, Rejoice," and "Good King Wenceslas" ([Ref. 5](#)).

John Mason Neale translated "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation" in 1851 from the second part of the 6th or 7th century Latin monastic hymn, "Urbs beata Jerusalem" ([Ref. 2](#)). This hymn now is commonly sung to the tune of *Westminster Abbey* by Henry Purcell (1659-1695) ([Ref. 2](#), [Ref. 6](#)) or the tune of *Regent Square* composed by Henry Thomas Smart (1813-1879) ([Ref. 2](#), [Ref. 7](#)).

## Biblical Allusions

For the following discussion of the biblical allusions in "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation," please refer to the text of the four hymn verses in the attached hymn sheet (Ref. 3 below, Ref. 8).

### *"Christ is made the sure foundation" (hymn, verse 1)*

The foundation of the church and our lives is Jesus Christ himself. John Mason Neale likely had Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11 in mind. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, the Apostle Paul writes, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." In Ephesians 2:19-20, Paul writes, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone."

Jesus Christ is the sure foundation of the church and of our lives as believers in Christ. All of God's truth about salvation and the teachings of the Apostles are firmly based on him (1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Ephesians 2:19-21, Thayer's Greek Lexicon - Ref. 9).

### *"Christ the head and cornerstone" (hymn, verse 1)*

Christ at the same time is both the head of the church and the cornerstone of God's household. Paul describes our Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church in both Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18. "And He [*God the Father - Ephesians 1:17*] put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22, brackets added). "He is also head of the body, the church ..." (Colossians 1:18).

Jesus Christ also is the cornerstone of God's household [literally, God's *family*] (Ref. 10). "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone* ..." (Ephesians 2:19-20).

*"Chosen of the Lord and precious" (hymn, verse 1)*

Both 1 Peter 2:4 and 1 Peter 2:6 describe Christ as chosen and precious. 1 Peter 2:4 tells us that even though Christ was rejected by men, he was "choice and precious in the sight of God." 1 Peter 2:6 goes on to say that the Lord Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone described by the prophet Isaiah. "Behold, I am laying in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, And the one who believes in Him will not be put to shame" (1 Peter 2:6 quoting Isaiah 28:16).

*"Binding all the church in one" (hymn, verse 1)*

"Binding the church in one" is a great theme of Ephesians 2:11-22. By the blood of Christ, our Lord Jesus has made both groups (Jews and Gentiles) into one, breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:13-14). Jesus Christ himself has reconciled Christian believers of all demographic characteristics into one body through the cross (Ephesians 2:16, Ephesians 4:4-6).

*"Laud and Honor to the Father" (hymn, verse 4)*

John Mason Neale concludes the hymn with these joyous words of praise to our triune God:

"Laud and honor to the Father,  
 laud and honor to the Son,  
 laud and honor to the Spirit,  
 ever three and ever one;  
 one in might and one in glory,  
 while unending ages run."  
 -- John Mason Neale (Ref. 3 below; Ref. 8)

Praise God that our Lord Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Prayer**

Thank you, Father, for providing your Son to be the foundation of our lives.  
 Thank you, Jesus, for being the cornerstone of your church, uniting all

believers in you into one body through your blood shed on the cross. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for fitting us together as living stones into one holy temple where we worship you and give you -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- all the praise and glory. Amen.

### **Listen and Sing Along**

Listen to and sing along with "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation" (Westminster Abbey tune) sung at St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, Scotland.

### **References**

1. <https://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh559.sht>
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ\\_is\\_Made\\_the\\_Sure\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_is_Made_the_Sure_Foundation)
3. The United Methodist Hymnal, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989
4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Mason\\_Neale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mason_Neale)
5. [https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns\\_and\\_Carols/Biographies/john\\_mason\\_neale.htm](https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/Biographies/john_mason_neale.htm)
6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Purcell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Purcell)
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Smart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Smart)
8. <https://www.ministrymatters.com/files/760/Christ%20Is%20Made%20the%20Sure%20Foundation.pdf>
9. <https://biblehub.com/greek/2310.htm>
10. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3609.htm>
11. <https://biblehub.com/greek/444.htm>

# 559 Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

1. Christ is made the sure foun - da - tion, Christ the head and  
 2. To this tem - ple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of  
 3. Here vouch - safe to all thy ser - vants what they ask of  
 4. Laud and hon - or to the Fa - ther, laud and hon - or

cor - ner - stone; cho - sen of the Lord and pre - cious,  
 Hosts, to - day! With thy faith - ful lov - ing - kind - ness  
 thee to gain; what they gain from thee for - ev - er  
 to the Son, laud and hon - or to the Spir - it,

bind - ing all the church in one; ho - ly Zi - on's  
 hear thy peo - ple as they pray, and thy full - est  
 with the bless - ed to re - tain, and here - af - ter  
 ev - er three and ev - er one; one in might and

help for - ev - er, and her con - fi - dence a - lone.  
 ben - e - dic - tion shed with - in its walls al - way.  
 in thy glo - ry ev - er - more with thee to reign.  
 one in glo - ry, while un - end - ing a - ges run.