



## Isaiah 8:14

### A Rock of Salvation and a Stumbling Stone

The background for chapter eight of Isaiah is the Assyrian invasion. It is a picture of political intrigue and panic. The prophet is trying to encourage King Ahaz and the people of Judah to trust in the LORD God and not enter political treaties with the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Syria against the superpower Assyria. The prophet announces coming judgment if King Ahaz does not put his trust in Yahweh.

The nation is so low spiritually under Ahaz's leadership that when the prophet calls for trust in the LORD the politicians and the people accuse him of a "conspiracy." The king accused the prophet of being a troublemaker because he did not go by the polls and the political programs. Ahaz has opted to follow the polls and popular opinion instead of the word of God. The politicians accuse Isaiah of a right wing "conspiracy" because he opposes compromise with the pagan nations (8:11-13). The challenge is to fear the LORD! Put your confidence in Him. If you are going to conspire, conspire with Him. Don't put your faith in the king of Assyria; put your faith in the LORD your God. Because Isaiah sided with Yahweh they saw him in service of the enemy and conspiring to overthrow the government. No one was more loyal to the Lord God and His covenant nation than the prophets. The clarion call was, "You are to fear Yahweh!"

If the king and the people had sanctified Yahweh and feared Him there would be no conspiracy (v. 13). If you give the LORD His proper place in your life then you will fear and dread Him. If you put Him first you will sanctify and honor Him. If you don't regard Him as holy then He will be for you "a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v. 14).

#### *What is your attitude toward the Lord?*

The imagery in verse fourteen is a man fleeing the coming judgment. If the man is a believer and fleeing in time of trouble the altar will be a sanctuary, the place where he meets God in salvation and security. However, if he is an unbeliever who has no time for God, then the altar is only a heap of stones to strike and stumble over. Look how Isaiah reinforced the thought of salvation and judgment in verses 13-15.

It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.  
And He shall be your fear,  
And He shall be your dread.

Then He [the LORD of hosts whom you regard as holy] shall become a sanctuary;  
But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,  
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
And many will stumble over them,  
Then they will fall and be broken;  
They will even be snared and caught.

The admonition is clear, sanctify yourselves and the LORD will be to you a sanctuary. If you sanctify Him, He will be a sanctuary for you. He will be your salvation and security.

The Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch observed: "All who sanctified the Lord of lords He surrounded like temple walls: hid them in Himself, whilst death and tribulation reigned without, and comforted, fed, and blessed them in His own gracious fellowship."

However, for those who refuse to trust in Yahweh He will be a stone of stumbling that will crush them in judgment. Verse fifteen says God will set for the people not only a rock to crush them but a spring loaded bird trap to snare them. Because of the stone many will stumble, fall and be crushed. They will be completely destroyed.

### *Who is this Rock of Salvation and Stone of Stumbling?*

The apostle Peter captures this idea and reminds his readers, "You who believe the Lord is precious will not be disappointed in Him. But you who are disobedient and refuse to believe in Him, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is the head stone and a stone of stumbling and rock of offense" (Pounds paraphrase). He combines two verses from Isaiah (28:16; 8:14) with Psalm 118:22 in 1 Peter 2:6-8. The chief corner stone is the stone of stumbling and rock of offence for those who refuse to believe. However, He is the solid rock of salvation to those who choose to believe. The purpose of the "stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone" is a foundation that gives stability and security to the believer.

How can the chief corner stone become the stumbling stone and rock of offense? "They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they are also appointed," writes Peter (1 Peter 2:8).

Who is this rock of offense? Clearly, it is Jesus of Nazareth, God's chosen and choice stone.

Simeon was in the Temple of Jerusalem when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be dedicated. Simeon was "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Messiah)" (Luke 2:25-26). Simeon took Jesus in his arms and "blessed God." He recognized that Jesus was the Anointed of God and praised God that he was allowed to see His Son. Simeon blessed Jesus and His parents and praised God. Then he said to Mary, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed and a sword will pierce even your own soul – to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (vv. 34-35). Did you catch it? This Child will be a stumbling block "for the fall and rise of many in Israel."

Later in his Gospel Dr. Luke quotes a parable Jesus gave on the Vine growers association (Luke 20:9-18). In making His application Jesus asked a question while quoting Psalm 118:22. "What then is this that is

In making His application Jesus asked a question while quoting Psalm 118:22. "What then is this that is written, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'?" Then He quickly added, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust" (v. 18). Luke observes, "And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them" (v. 19).

Our attitude toward Him determines our spiritual welfare. He is a sanctuary to those who sanctify Him. He is a place of refuge, peace and security to those who believe. However, to those who reject Him He becomes a stone to trip over. He becomes a crushing stone of judgment to the proud of heart. Many people collide with Him and trip over Him because they try to live as if He didn't exist. Jesus Christ will always be a stumbling stone to those who refuse to trust in Him.

"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). The Jewish people were always asking for signs and the Greeks were in search of wisdom. "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (vv. 22-24).

Peter used the illustration of the rejected stone becoming God's chosen stone in a sermon on the death and resurrection of Jesus. He concluded his message saying, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus and the salvation He offers is a stumbling stone for many.

However, He brings eternal life and inner peace to those who believe on Him. In his great chapters on the sovereignty of God in salvation the apostle Paul draws the conclusion that Gentiles, who did not have any interest in the righteousness of God, have "attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith" (Romans 9:30). They were unconcerned and indifferent pagans. They were not concerned about a right standing with God. Yet, God in His rich grace and mercy chose to save them by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, Israel, who had been pursuing a law of righteousness, never arrived at God's righteousness. Gentiles attained this righteousness, but Israel failed. Why? Paul tells us, "They stumbled over 'the stumbling stone,' just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed'" (9:32-33 quoting Isaiah 8:14; 28:16).

The Gentiles obtained a right standing with God which was a "righteousness that is by faith." The problem was in the way the Jews pursued righteousness. They wanted to do it their way, not God's way. They wanted to use the Law as a means of obtaining righteousness. However, by the works of the law they could never attain it because they were sinners. They could never perfectly obey the law. Christ alone has fulfilled the law. Paul saw the law as a means of leading people to Christ and a right relationship with God. Instead of seeking God's righteousness by faith, they stumbled over works righteousness. "The righteousness that answers the demands of the law, is the righteousness of God, which is received by faith. The Jews, then, did not attain to it, because they sought it not by faith, but as of works of law" (Robert Haldane). It is impossible to attain salvation other than by justification by faith. Righteousness is by faith. The Jews refused to come by faith. They sought the right goal in the wrong way, and therefore stumbled over Christ. Paul applies the stone of stumbling and rock that crushes in Isaiah 8:14 to Christ. He had no hesitation in applying to Christ those Old Testament passages that refer to the Lord of hosts.

God's sovereign will does not eliminate human responsibility. The Jewish people's lack of faith prevented them from recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. They had an attitude problem. Instead of begin the cause of

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them from recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. They had an attitude problem. Instead of begin the cause of great rejoicing in the rich blessings of Yahweh, He became a "stumbling stone" to them.

Christ is the Stone. Is He a stone of offense or a rock of salvation for you? The believer will never be ashamed before God because Christ is his righteousness.

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