

**Romans (59):
“The Stone of Stumbling”**

Let us turn in our Bibles to Romans 9.

We have seen in this chapter the clear teaching that salvation is wholly due to God’s sovereign grace; God chooses whom He purposes to save from sin according to His free will and He has purposed in His justice to leave the rest of fallen humanity to perish in their sins. God has chosen to save His people through faith. **Ephesians 2:8** and **9** declare the truth clearly of God as the sole cause of our salvation:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

God saves us by His grace, His kind favor that He has chosen to bestow upon us who believe on Jesus Christ. Through His grace He enables His elect to have faith in Jesus Christ, which in turn results in the believer’s forgiveness of sins. God exonerates the guilty sinner of his guilt and upon his faith God regards and thereafter treats the believer as righteous in His sight. This is because God the Father regards the death of His Son on the cross to be the satisfactory punishment, even full payment, for the indebtedness to God’s justice that the sinner had incurred through having transgressed God’s law.¹

The apostle Peter also wrote of the faith that brings salvation.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵*who by God’s power* (i.e. God’s grace) *are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹*obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* (1 Pet. 1:3-8)

Today we will consider more fully the nature of the faith that God produces and sustains by His grace in His people, the ones whom He has chosen in eternity to save through Jesus Christ. Let us give our attention to how God saved the Gentiles through faith and how Israel, that is, a majority of the Jewish people, failed to be saved due to their unbelief, refusing to embrace Jesus as their Messiah. Let us read **Romans 9:30-33**.

³⁰What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” (Rom. 9:30-33)

¹ This debt we owe to God’s justice is due to three forms of breaking God’s law: (1) through Adam’s sin having represented us when he broke God’s covenant of works, when He initially transgressed God’s law, (2) through all of the actual sins we commit breaking God’s laws (sins of commission), (3) through the failure to comply to God’s laws (sins of omission).

The apostle was explaining on the one hand why it was that if Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Jewish Messiah, why had not Israel, that is, the Jewish people, embraced Him as such? On the other hand, why was it that so many of the Gentile world embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior? This was a dilemma particularly when one considers the history of the Jewish people and their centuries-long covenantal relationship with God and the history of the Gentile nations having been estranged from God. How was it that Gentiles believed on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Jewish people, for the most part, rejected Jesus? After all, for many centuries the Jews had sought to attain a righteous standing before God but the Gentiles never had such desires. Nevertheless, whereas the Jews failed to attain a righteous standing before God, the Gentiles had done so. How did this occur? Paul declared that Israel had failed to do so because they had sought to attain a righteous standing with God through their good works, but Gentiles had submitted to God's way of attaining righteousness, that was through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

We may read on in **Romans 10:1-4** for further explanation of what had occurred among the Jews and Gentiles. Paul wrote,

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ²For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Here we see that zeal, that is sincerity and personal effort in seeking to please God, will not be successful in attaining a right relationship with God, apart from the right knowledge of how God has revealed that a righteous standing before Him may be obtained. Sincerity counts for nothing if it is governed by heresy and directed toward a false end using false means. If zeal were the way sinners obtained salvation, then religious zealots irrespective of their faith, whether they were monks living in deprivation in monasteries or terrorists blowing up busses would be right with God. But God's way of righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. To trust in one's own righteousness will result in condemnation on the Day of Judgment. But to trust in God's Son Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior results in a free and full righteous standing before God. This is because the forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God is only obtained by guilty sinners through the righteousness of another, even due to the righteousness and death of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Now verse 4 is commonly misinterpreted by believers. Many cite this verse out of context to argue that New Testament Christians are not under the law of God as a rule of life. They argue by quoting verse 4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness"; that the law is no longer an abiding rule of life. They falsely draw a conclusion that because we cannot save ourselves by the works of the law but that we can only be saved from sin through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, that the law of God is no longer a standard of behavior for Christians. Now it is true that Christians are not under the law as a covenant, but it is not true that Christians are no longer under the law of God as a rule of life. They wrongly assume that "end" here means the cessation of the law as a rule of life; they claim that verse 4 means that Christ brought an end to the law of God as a rule of life. But the word "end" here does not mean the law of God no longer has authority to guide and instruct the Christian, here the "end" is the arrival of a destination, the end of a path or a journey. In other words, had Israel followed rightly God's manner of observing His law, Israel would have ended their quest by putting their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The end, or the destination, or the outcome of rightly following the law of God is faith alone for salvation in Jesus Christ, He being the crucified, buried, and risen Savior of sinners. Christ is the end, the destination, of all who are taught rightly to live according to the law of God as God intended for His people to live.

And so, the problem with the Jews is that they had sought to obtain salvation in a faulty manner. God had given Israel His law that they were to observe and follow. Had they done so rightly, it would have resulted in them seeing their sinfulness and their inability to keep God's laws. Every sacrifice of an animal that they offered in the temple taught them this is what they deserved for transgressing God's laws. The fact that they had to forfeit the life of an animal in their place showed them they were incapable of keeping God's law and that God must provide another and better way to obtain the forgiveness of sins. The sacrificial death of those animals, which could never atone for their sins, pointed them to the end that God would send them a Savior who would accomplish living according to His law in a manner they were incapable and that He would die as a

sacrifice for sinners enabling God's justice to be satisfied respecting their sins. The law of God, had it been understood and followed rightly, would have resulted in them looking outside themselves to God's promised provision of a Savior whom God would send to save them from their sins. Had they followed the law rightly, that law would have led them in the end to believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. But rather than submitting to God bestowing freely the gift of righteousness through faith alone, they believed that they had been accruing righteousness through their own obedience to God's law or the mere possession of that law. Thus the Jews had failed to attain to the righteousness of God even though they had "sought" it. Rather than simply trusting in God's provision of salvation in Jesus Christ, to use Paul's metaphor, they "stumbled" on their path over a stone, to their own fall and ruin.

Paul declared that God Himself had placed this stone of stumbling in the path of Israel so that they would stumble and fall, in other words, that they would ultimately reject Jesus Christ as the promised Savior resulting in their damnation. As was his common practice, Paul cited another Old Testament verse to substantiate his teaching. Paul over and over again quoted Old Testament verses as instruction for New Testament Christians. For Paul the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, our Old Testament, fell into the category of written Scripture. It was to this collection of Old Testament books that Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:14-17**.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

Now again, Paul was speaking directly here of the Old Testament Scriptures. He instructed Timothy to "continue in what you learned" from them. He told Timothy that these Old Testament Scriptures were able to make Timothy "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." This is a clear affirmation that the Old Testament should be regarded as Christian Scripture.

When you hear a well-intentioned Christian say that the Christian is not to look to the Old testament for authoritative and normative instruction for New Testament Christians, or they tell you that you should only regard those verses of the Old Testament cited or repeated in the New Testament to be as Christian Scripture, you may cite 2 Timothy 3:14-17 as Scriptural proof of their abiding validity and authority for the Christian.

Now let us consider the verse in Romans 9:33 that Paul cited to substantiate his teaching. Paul had declared that *"They (the Jews) have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.'*" The verse is taken from Isaiah 8. This is the third verse from Isaiah that Paul quoted in Romans 9. The first two references were from Isaiah 1 and Isaiah 10. This verse is taken from **Isaiah 8:14**. Let us read turn to this prophetic oracle, which is contained in **Isaiah 8:1-22**.

As the other two verses that we considered in recent weeks that Paul used in Romans 9, this verse speaks to the same period of history as the other two. It speaks of the historic occasion in which God judged both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. God used the world empire of the day, Assyria, to judge His people. This prophetic oracle of Isaiah 8 preceded the event and it provides some background information that precipitated God's judgment. But we also know from the use of Isaiah's prophetic words by New Testament writers², that imbedded in this prophecy of judgment is the hope of salvation in God sending His future Messiah to save the remnant of Jews that He had chosen for Himself.

Let me establish the historic setting for us. It began with what is commonly referred to as the Syro-Ephraimite War. "Syro" refers to the nation of Syria and "Ephraimite" refers to Ephraim³, which is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel. In other words, the Syro-Ephraimite War occurred when **Syria** and

² Including Paul (Rom. 9:33), Peter (1 Pet. 2:8), and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:13).

³ Ephraim was the name of Joseph's second son. His two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, came to be viewed as two of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Israel aligned together in order to attack the southern kingdom of **Judah**. The other player of this war was the empire of **Assyria**. Now it is important not to confuse the nation of Syria (capital, Damascus) and the empire of Assyria (capital, Nineveh). Syria was a much smaller nation than Assyria, which was the largest empire of the day. [See the map included at the end of these notes.]

We may read of the onset of the hostilities in **Isaiah 7:1ff**.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it. ²And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

³Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field, ⁴and say to him: 'Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah. ⁵Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, ⁶'Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabeal'-- ⁷thus says the Lord GOD:

"It shall not stand,

Nor shall it come to pass.

⁸For the head of Syria is Damascus,

And the head of Damascus is Rezin.

Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken,

So that it will not be a people.

⁹The head of Ephraim is Samaria,

And the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.

If you will not believe,

Surely you shall not be established."'''

¹⁰Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹"Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."

¹²But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!"

¹³Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. ¹⁵Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. ¹⁷The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house-- days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah."

¹⁸And it shall come to pass in that day

That the LORD will whistle for the fly

That is in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt,

And for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹They will come, and all of them will rest

In the desolate valleys and in the clefts of the rocks,

And on all thorns and in all pastures.

Isaiah prophesied to Judah, while he resided in Jerusalem. God told him to go to his king, King Ahaz, and exhort Him to trust God that He would protect him and his nation from the alliance of Syria and Ephraim (Syria) who were amassing their armies on his northern border. But King Ahaz, rather than trusting God to deliver Judah, sent an embassy to far off Assyria. He delivered a great deal of treasure as a bribe as well as his promise to submit to Assyrian rule if Assyria would bring its forces down in order to defeat the armies of Syria

and Israel, or Ephraim. We may read of this in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Here is the account in **2 Kings 16:1-16**:

In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. ²Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done. ³But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel.

⁴And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. ⁵Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him. ⁶At that time Rezin king of Syria captured Elath for Syria, and drove the men of Judah from Elath. Then the Edomites went to Elath, and dwell there to this day.

⁷So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me." ⁸And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria. ⁹So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.

¹⁰Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship. ¹¹Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest made it before King Ahaz came back from Damascus. ¹²And when the king came back from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it. ¹³So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. ¹⁴He also brought the bronze altar which was before the LORD, from the front of the temple-- from between the new altar and the house of the LORD-- and put it on the north side of the new altar. ¹⁵Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, "On the great new altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt sacrifice, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by." ¹⁶Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded.

We see that King Ahaz, rather than trusting God's promise to save his people, sought the assistance of Assyria. We see that when he made an alliance with the king of Assyria, he also became corrupt in his religious convictions, having adopted the idolatrous ways of Assyria. He had failed, even refused to trust God to save his people from their enemies, trusting rather in his own abilities to forge a relationship with the Assyrian king, trusting in what his reason assumed would save him, that being the largest empire of the day, rather than the God of His people. It is a classic illustration of someone who walks by sight rather than faith, one who trusts his own resources and abilities, in other words, his own works, rather than humbling himself before God and trusting in God to deliver him and his people.

Now, just to bring us back to Paul's argument of Romans 9. For King Ahaz to trust in the king of Assyria to save him from God's judgment was as foolish and futile as a person trying to save himself through his own efforts at being religious, doing good works, rather than simply trusting in Jesus Christ to be saved from God's judgment. Ahaz was a type or an historical illustration, what it was for the Jewish people to attempt to escape God's wrath by their own possession or keeping of the law of God rather than believing solely on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The result of king Ahaz refusing to have faith in God was to incur God's judgment. God purposed that He would indeed use Assyria to deliver Judah from the threat of the Syro-Ephramite alliance. Assyria defeated and subjugated both Syria and Israel. I suspect that King Ahaz thought himself wise a resourceful in his political alliances. But the king of Assyria did not stop with the defeat of Syria and Israel, but he proceeded to invade Judah. Judah would then have to deal with a greater threat than merely Syria and Israel. Judah would then have to contend with the king of Assyria, whom the Lord would use as his instrument to bring judgment

upon Judah. This is the context of the oracle that we have in **Isaiah 8:1-22**. Let us consider the details of this prophecy with view to how Paul used verse 14 in Romans 9:33..

We read in verses 1 and 2 as the beginning of this prophetic oracle. **Isaiah 8:1f** read, **¹Moreover the LORD said to me, “Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man’s pen concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. ²And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”** We do not have time to address the previous oracle of Isaiah 9. But there God gave a sign to the king through the birth of a child who would be named **Immanuel**, meaning, “God with us.” Now God gives another sign through the birth of another child. This would have been the birth of Isaiah’s second son.⁴ His name means “Speed the spoil; hasten the booty.” The name of this child was a confirming message from God to King Ahaz that God’s judgment would soon be upon them. Two persons are mentioned, who were close advisors to King Ahaz, who had probably counseled him to trust in Assyria. God’s message of judgment was written out on a scroll, and witnessed by these two men; all would know that this was God’s doing.

Verses 3 and 4 record the realization of this sign to King Ahaz. **³Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; ⁴for before the child shall have knowledge to cry “My father” and “My mother,” the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.’”** The prophetess was Isaiah’s wife. Perhaps she was regarded as a prophetess because she was the wife of the prophet, or she may have been a prophetess herself, through whom God communicated His Word to the people.⁵ God reveals that before this child would be old enough to call out to his parents, the judgment of God will have brought an end to the Syro-Ephraimite alliance. “Damascus”, the capital of Syria is mentioned as well as “Samaria”, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. With the capitals destroyed, those nations were destroyed. I suspect that when this did occur, King Ahaz and the people of Judah thought that they had escaped the danger that had threatened their existence.

But then Isaiah gives a further word. We read in **verses 5 through 8** that God will cause Assyria then to attack and destroy Judah.

⁵The LORD also spoke to me again, saying:

**⁶“Inasmuch as these people refused
The waters of Shiloah that flow softly,
And rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah’s son;
⁷Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them
The waters of the River, strong and mighty—
The king of Assyria and all his glory;
He will go up over all his channels
And go over all his banks.
⁸He will pass through Judah,
He will overflow and pass over,
He will reach up to the neck;
And the stretching out of his wings
Will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel.**

Because Judah had failed to trust in God’s promise to deliver them if they would trust Him, and because they then rejoiced when they thought the threat of Syria and Israel was no longer, God purposed to judge them through His instrument, Assyria. Here the reference to the “waters of Shiloah” may refer to the relatively small spring that had water to Jerusalem through which God would preserve His people through a siege of the city as

⁴ The name of the first son was Shear-Jashub, whose name brought a message to Judah’s king as recorded in Isaiah 7:3.

⁵ There were many “prophetesses” identified in the Bible. This was not a violation of the principle that a woman should not have teaching authority over a man because the prophetess was wholly passive in the bringing forth of the word of God. God spoke His word directly through the mouthpiece of the prophetess.

they waited for God's deliverance. But instead of trusting in what appeared to be God's inadequate provision, and they instead depended upon their own wits (i.e. works) by putting their trust in Assyria, God will judge them by Assyria. Here the Assyrian armies are likened unto a great flood of the Euphrates River. Assyria was located on the banks of the Euphrates, here, "the River." The army comes as flood down upon Palestine sweeping over Judah. It is a "flood" of God's judgment upon this people that had refused to put their faith in Him. It will decimate the land and its population. It would have exterminated the nation, if the "flood waters" not stopped, having reached to the depth of the neck.⁶

God then gave a confirming word through Isaiah of His intention to judge this people. We read in **verses 9 and 10**:

**⁹"Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!
Give ear, all you from far countries.
Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces;
Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces.
¹⁰Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
Speak the word, but it will not stand,
For God is with us."**

We then read of God's instruction directly given to His prophet, beginning with **verses 11 and 12**. Isaiah recounted what God had told him. **"For the LORD spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying:**

**¹²"Do not say, 'A conspiracy,'
Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy,
Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.**

The Lord warned Isaiah not to align himself with the people of Judah, for God had determined to bring His judgment upon them. He made His point clear; He spoke with a "strong hand."

Here God refers to the people of Judah as "this people", not "My people", which was how He addressed them when He had owned them as His covenant people. But because of their failure to place their faith in Him to deliver them from the threat that was upon them, He rejected them and purposed to judge them. He did not want His faithful prophet to be found among them, when His judgment fell.

God told Isaiah not to accept the charges against him by the people that he was guilty of a conspiracy against the people. They had regarded Isaiah as a traitor for refusing to endorse the king's dependence upon Assyria for their deliverance. God encouraged His prophet not to not to fear them. Rather, we read in **verse 13**:

**¹³The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow;
Let Him be your fear,
And let Him be your dread.**

Even though king Ahaz and his people refused to trust God, Isaiah was to continue to order his life in faith. He was not to fear the threat of Assyria or of his own people. His concern should be to please God and he should strive to be faithful to Him. The people did not fear the Lord; they would not trust His Word to them. Rather, their fear of what the armies of Syria and Israel might do to them is what governed their thinking and their actions.

God then promises to protect His prophet. **Verse 14** reads, **"He will be as a sanctuary."** God will see to it that his prophet is preserved.

But the same God who promised to be a sanctuary or a place of protection for Isaiah, declared that He would be the cause of the people's overthrow. We read that God would be to both Israel and Judah: **"but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the**

⁶ This probably suggests God's sparing Jerusalem as His remnant when He rescued the city through the prayer and faith of King Hezekiah, who ruled after King Ahaz.

inhabitants of Jerusalem” (v. 14). God Himself would be the cause of their “stumbling.” Instead of Him being a rock of defense for them, He would be a rock of offence to them. He would cause even the inhabitants of Jerusalem to be caught in a snare. The very One whom they thought would save them, was the One who would bring His judgment upon them.

When we turn to the New Testament we read that this verse is applied to Jesus Christ. Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:6ff.

⁶For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” ⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸and **“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”** They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

What is true of God in Isaiah 8 is true of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2. Jesus Christ is to us who believe our sanctuary. But to those who refuse to believe on Him, He causes them to stumble to their own ruin. In other words, Jesus Christ becomes the instrument of their overthrow.⁷

What was the result of God’s judgment? **Verse 15** reads,

¹⁵**And many among them shall stumble;
They shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.”**

God’s judgment is severe. They will be defeated and destroyed and the captives are “taken” into exile. This is what happened upon Assyria’s defeat of its enemies.

But in contrast to those who refuse to trust God as their Protector, as their Savior, as their Sanctuary, the prophet declared his commitment to make God’s Word known and embraced by those who stood with Him. **Verse 16** records Isaiah’s words in which he commits to teach these things to the ones who believe as he did. **“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.”** He then made a commitment of faith to stay true to His God. **Verses 17 and 18** declare:

¹⁷**And I will wait on the LORD,
Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;
And I will hope in Him.**
¹⁸**Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!
We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the LORD of hosts,
Who dwells in Mount Zion.**

The prophet describes God as hard to be seen. The people of Judah do not see Him for they refuse to believe on Him. But the prophet confesses his commitment to continue to have faith in His God and have hope in the things that God has promised to believers.

Isaiah confesses that He and his children, that being his disciples, are for signs and wonders in Israel. Isaiah’s natural children were given names that reflected God’s dealings with His people.⁸ The writer to the Hebrews uses this verse to describe Jesus Christ with His elect gathered about Him, whom He regards as His children.

The prophet Isaiah next warned the people not to seek the counsel of false prophets. When the calamities of God’s judgment begin to fall upon the people, the false prophets then attempt to lead the people to follow

⁷ And with respect to Israel in the first century, because they rejected the Stone that would have served as a foundation stone for them, Jesus Christ became a stumbling stone to them. The judgment of God fell upon Jerusalem and the people of Israel in the days of the first century. After the Jews had rejected their Messiah, He became the One who pronounced judgment upon the people and He sent His armies (Roman armies) to cause the desolation of Jerusalem in AD 70.

⁸ His two sons were named Shear-Jashub and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.

them and call upon their gods. They claim to receive instruction for how to live from the spirits of those who are dead. The prophet reasons that their ways are foolish and fruitless. **Verses 19ff** read,

¹⁹And when they say to you, “Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?

The false prophets attempt to have the dead speak through them; they “whisper and mutter, attempting to give counsel to the living. Rather, people should seek to hear from God through the Holy Scriptures. If the teachers do not speak in accordance with the Scriptures, it is because they are void of truth. He declared in verse 20, **“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”**

The result of the judgment of God will be their defeat and destruction. Many of them would be marched off into slavery with no hope of deliverance apparent to them.

²¹They will pass through it hard pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. ²²Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness.

As the defeated people of Judah are marched out of the land in slavery, they look about for some basis of hope, but see none. They are greatly distressed and hungry, having survived the siege, but have now lost their liberty and their land. They look about them and all is destroyed. There is no glimmer of hope. They look to the skies, but even there they see only dark boding clouds, for they signify that God Himself has abandoned them. They are hopeless, defeated, destroyed, and despondent. But did God’s judgment humble them? Did it lead them to repent and seek His favor and forgiveness? No, but they were hardened in their sin. They continued to defy and curse their king and God, even as they are driven into their dispersion into the Gentile world.

Now it is unfortunate that we must leave Isaiah’s prophecy with this somber word. But realize that this is not the end. For it is only after God had utterly exhausted all of these people’s resources, when they had lost everything and there was nothing left of themselves in which they could trust, that now they were now prepared to be the objects of God’s mercy and grace. And so it is here, in the very next passage, that the glorious promise of the coming Savior is proclaimed to them. God declared in **Isaiah 9:1ff**:

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed,
As when at first He lightly esteemed
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
And afterward more heavily oppressed her,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
In Galilee of the Gentiles.

²The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation
And increased its joy;
They rejoice before You
According to the joy of harvest,
As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

⁴For You have broken the yoke of his burden
And the staff of his shoulder,
The rod of his oppressor,
As in the day of Midian.

⁵For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle,

And garments rolled in blood,
Will be used for burning and fuel of fire.
⁶For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:1-8)

This was fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior of His condemned and lost people. This is declared in Matthew 4:13-16 in which this passage is quoted. Those who put their trust in God's provision, Jesus Christ, would not be put to shame on the final Day of Judgment. He would secure their forgiveness of sins, and bestow upon them the gift of everlasting life in His kingdom of righteousness, joy and peace.

For many of us God had to strip of us of every human resource and reveal to us the folly of every religious effort of sham fig leaves to cover the nakedness and shame of our sins. But when He finally exposed to us our vulnerability as well as our inability, He revealed to us the Savior in whom we put our trust. He gave us new life. He infused us with hope and joy. He clothed us with the garment of salvation, even His own righteousness. We rejoice in Jesus Christ alone. Any God alone be praised for His unspeakable gift in Jesus Christ.