

God's "Precious Corner Stone" will become the Stumbling Block for Many!

Isaiah 28:1-17 (vv. 16-17)

Facilitator: Stephanie Wyche

I. Historical Background & Biblical Context

A. Historical Background

Following the reign of King Solomon, the unified nation split into the northern kingdom (Israel or Ephraim) and the southern kingdom (Judah). This division marked a turning point for God's chosen people. The northern kingdom quickly abandoned their faithfulness to the Lord and the covenant that had been their very foundation. In turning away from God, they fell into pride and idolatry. Instead of worshiping the one true God, they served false gods, and their leaders became more and more arrogant, ignoring the laws that had once set them apart as a holy nation.

Ephraim, one of the leading tribes of the northern kingdom, became a symbol of spiritual decline, as its former glory and beauty faded away (vs. 1). Once a strong and respected tribe, Ephraim grew complacent, indulgent, and prideful. Despite God sending prophets to warn them (vs. 2-4) and call them to repentance, the people of Ephraim refused to listen. They placed their desires above obedience to God, allowing pride to blind them to the graveness of their sins and the urgency for repentance, ultimately leading to their downfall and destruction.

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah faced similar challenges. Though initially more faithful, Judah was not far behind Ephraim in its spiritual decline. Like Ephraim, Judah became entangled in idolatry and moral corruption and struggled to fully trust in God amid constant threats from neighboring nations. They, too, fell into complacency and self-indulgence, allowing their moral and spiritual standards to deteriorate under the guidance of unfit leadership (vs. 7-10, 14-15). The priests and prophets, who were supposed to guide the people with wisdom and integrity, were instead corrupted by drunkenness and arrogance, rendering them incapable of sound judgment or spiritual direction. Their teachings became shallow and ineffective (vs. 9-10). This lack of

leadership led to a society that dismissed God's warnings and placed false confidence in foreign alliances and empty promises (vs. 14-15). The leaders refused to seek God's wisdom and left the people vulnerable to judgment and destruction.

Even today, we face the same challenges as Ephraim and Judah. Just as they allowed pride and complacency to lead them away from God, we often see nations, churches, and individuals prioritizing self-indulgence and worldly success over spiritual obedience. Just as the unfit leaders of Ephraim and Judah failed to guide their people toward righteousness, today's leaders have spread division and corruption amongst the people. Like Ephraim and Judah, many individuals dismiss the warnings and invitations to repent, choosing instead to rely on temporary solutions, such as material wealth, false idols or personal achievements.

B. Biblical Context

Yet in the midst of God's stern warnings to Ephraim and Judah, there is still hope and restoration. Despite their sin, God's mercy and redemptive plan have always been there. God spoke of a "precious cornerstone," a foundation of hope, salvation, and renewal that would stand firm against the crumbling walls of pride, idolatry, and moral decay. This cornerstone, foretold in Isaiah's prophecy, points to God's ultimate plan for redemption through Jesus Christ. Today's lesson focuses on this promise and reminder that even during judgment, God provides a sure foundation for those who trust in Him. This cornerstone was a message of hope for the remnant people of Isaiah's time but continues to be a cornerstone of faith for many of us today. Salvation and security are found in Christ alone.

II. Lesson: God's "Precious Corner Stone" will become the Stumbling Block for Many! (Isaiah 26:1-17 vv. 16-17)

In the previous lesson, Isaiah spoke about a time where God would intervene for the people in Ephraim and Judah to restore what has been broken and align everything according to His Plan of Salvation. In that day, God will set things right, judge the wicked, and crown the faithful remnant – a remnant who remain faithful to God through

it all. Now, we are introduced to God's "precious cornerstone" which has been revealed to us through the scriptures as Jesus Christ.

A. The Cornerstone as a Secure Foundation for the Faithful (vv. 16)

"So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'See I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the ones who rely on it will never be stricken with panic.'" (NIV)

What is a cornerstone? A cornerstone is the first stone placed in the foundation of a building. In ancient construction, it was typically set at the corner where two walls met, and the rest of the stones were laid based on its position. The entire structure depended on this initial stone. If the cornerstone was placed incorrectly, the entire building would be at risk.

Ok, but what does this mean in this context? God declares that He will lay a "precious cornerstone" in Zion that will be a stable, firm, and durable foundation for all believers. Unlike the shifting in today's leaders or those from the past, this cornerstone would represent God's unchanging and eternal plan that will unfold over time. He highlights three key characteristics of this stone: 1) it is tested, 2) it is precious, and 3) it is sure. First, **it is tested**, meaning it has been proven to be reliable and trustworthy, tried and found to endure. Second, **it is precious**, meaning it has unique value and significance, unmatched by anything else. Finally, **it is sure**, meaning that those who place their trust in it will not be moved or shaken.

Here, we also see a promise that for those who rely on it, there is no need to fear or panic. To believe in this cornerstone means to rely on it for both salvation and security, knowing that it will not fail. Those who trust in God's cornerstone can experience peace, resting in the assurance that they are secure in His promises.

B. The Cornerstone as a Stumbling Block for the Unfaithful (vv. 17)

"I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place." NIV

While the cornerstone is a secure foundation for those who place their trust in it, it can also become a stumbling block for those who reject it. In Matthew 21:42-44, Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22 to the religious leaders, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." He further warns that those who reject this cornerstone will find themselves broken by it. Similarly, in 1 Peter 2:6-8, the apostle Peter spoke of Jesus as the "precious cornerstone" for those who believe, but a "stone that causes people to stumble" and "a rock that makes them fall" for those who disobey and reject Him.

Jesus Himself embodies this cornerstone. He was rejected by many during His earthly ministry, yet He remains the unshakable foundation of our salvation. For those who embrace Him, He is the firm ground on which they stand. But for those who reject Him, He becomes a stumbling block and a cause of their downfall. Much like a building without a proper foundation will collapse in a storm, those who ignore God's truth will ultimately face judgment, unable to withstand the storms of life and eternity. The rejection of God's ways, as seen in the history of Israel, leads to a false sense of security. This "refuge of lies", trusting in anything other than God's truth, will lead to destruction.

God declares that He will measure the hearts and actions of His people with justice as the measuring line and righteousness as the plumb line. In construction, a measuring line ensures that every part of the building aligns correctly, while a plumb line guarantees that it is level and straight. Similarly, God's standards of justice and righteousness are the measures by which His people will be assessed. There is no escape from this standard. Everything will be judged according to these principles, and nothing will be exempt.

Those who reject God's ways, who build their lives on pride, complacency, and unbelief, will face the consequences of their choices. Just as a building without a foundation cannot stand, so too will lives built on anything other than God's truth be swept away in a complete and unavoidable destruction. This recalls Matthew 7:24-26 where Jesus contrasts two builders: one who builds his house on the rock and another who builds his house on sand. A life built on anything other than the firm foundation of God's word is destined to fail. When the inevitable storms of life come, those who have not anchored their lives in His truth will experience collapse and destruction.

III. Conclusion

His "precious cornerstone" serves as a foundation for those who trust Him and a stumbling block for those who refuse His truth. This challenges us to evaluate where we stand.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do pride and self-reliance create stumbling blocks in our spiritual journey?
2. In what ways can we ensure Christ is the foundation of our lives?
3. How does the cornerstone deepen your understanding of Christ's role in salvation and judgment?
4. How can we share the message of the cornerstone with those who may be stumbling over it?