

**Immanuel**  
**Isaiah 8:1-22**

Our text for this morning is Isaiah chapter 8, the whole chapter. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we do indeed pray and ask that you would bless this reading of your word; that from your word we would hear the voice of God. We ask that you would bless the teaching. We ask that we would be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 8: “<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD said to me, ‘Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, “Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”’ <sup>2</sup> And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me.’

“<sup>3</sup> And 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; <sup>4</sup> for before the boy knows how to cry “My father” or “My mother,” the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.’

“<sup>5</sup> The LORD spoke to me again: <sup>6</sup> ‘Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, <sup>7</sup> therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, <sup>8</sup> and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.’

“<sup>9</sup> Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. <sup>10</sup> Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

“<sup>11</sup> For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: <sup>12</sup> ‘Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. <sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.’

“<sup>16</sup> Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. <sup>17</sup> I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup> Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. <sup>19</sup> And when they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup> To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. <sup>21</sup> They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. <sup>22</sup> And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.” Amen. May God bless His word.

Well, to state the obvious, Isaiah 8 comes after Isaiah 7. Why do I say that? Because Isaiah 8 is a further development and application of things that have already been covered in Isaiah chapter 7. In Isaiah chapter 7, if you remember from last week, King Ahaz was approached by the prophet Isaiah, and Isaiah took before King Ahaz his own son, called Shear-jashub, which means “a remnant will return.”

And Ahaz was tested by God. God demanded of Ahaz faith. “Trust in me. Trust in me, and you will be delivered,” was God’s message to Ahaz. And He said to Ahaz, “Furthermore, ask a sign—any sign that you want to see. Let it be as high as the heavens. I will perform a sign and confirm to you my word, my promises that you are hearing through the prophet Isaiah.” And if you remember, Ahaz failed the test. He did not ask for a sign, he wanted no sign. He had already decided how he was going to, he thought, solve his problems. He was going to form an alliance with the king of Assyria.

In response, Isaiah pronounced a sign—this response was from God, and the sign pronounced, remember, was a sign of judgment to the people of Judah. God would send a son; God would send them a child; the virgin would conceive; a child would be born who would be called Immanuel—“God with us.” The Saviour. The Messiah—God with us. This was a judgment upon the house of David. This is God saying, “The house of David has failed, and I will send a Saviour who will come in both judgment and salvation. Emmanuel.” And God spoke of the fact that because the king of Judah had chosen to put his trust in the kings of the world, worldly politices, worldly armies—He said that He would call forth the soldiers, like clouds of bees, like clouds of flies. The enemies would come into the land and fill every crag and cleft in ravening. That’s our context as we come in to chapter 8.

Chapter 8 is actually quite an important chapter, in terms of how it’s used in the New Testament. It’s quoted a number of times, in a number of different places. Verse 13 of chapter 8 is quoted in First Peter chapter 3, verse 15. If you know that reference, you will know that it’s where Peter tells us to be ready to give a reason for what it is that we believe. But he gives the commandment to be ready to give a reason for what it is that we believe in the context of quoting Isaiah, and telling the people that they should sanctify the Lord—and Peter was speaking of Jesus—they should sanctify the Lord as holy in their hearts.

Let me read you the reference from First Peter chapter 3, verse 15: “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” So Peter quotes this as the basis for our hope. If you remember—some of you were here and some were not—but we actually went through the book of First Peter a couple of years back now.

First Peter was given to the Christians of the day as a response the coming persecution. They were already at that time starting to suffer persecution, and persecution was coming. And Peter told the Christians that they must sanctify Christ as Yahweh in their hearts, or as God in their hearts. They must truly worship Christ. And in truly worshiping Christ, they must prepared to always give a reason for the hope that is in them.

Peter quotes from Isaiah chapter 8, when he tells them to honor Christ the Lord as holy. If you just look at verse 13 of Isaiah chapter 8, it says in the ESV, “But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” Perhaps you might not see that it’s such a citation, but in the Septuagint, which Peter was quoting, it’s practically a word-for-word quotation.

Verses 14 and 15 of our chapter are referenced in the gospels of both Matthew and Luke, and in the book of Romans. They’re also referenced in First Peter again, this time First Peter chapter 2. If you look at verses 14 and 15 of our chapter, it speaks of the Lord. Let’s read it from verse 13: “<sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”<sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.””

Well in First Peter chapter 2, reading from verse 7: “<sup>7</sup> So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’”—that’s a quote from the Psalms—“<sup>8</sup> and ‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.” That’s the quote from our passage this morning, Isaiah chapter 8. Also, as we’ve already read in Hebrews chapter 2 this morning, this contains two references to our passage this morning.

That makes it a well-cited passage in the New Testament. That tells us, therefore, that though this passage did have particular meaning for the people of Judah at that time, it is a messianic passage; it is to be interpreted in the light of how it’s being used in the New Testament to teach us about Jesus.

So first of all, before I try and get any depth of understanding, or any look at how it’s used in the New Testament with any depth, I just want us to go through it and understand it in the light of what’s being said to the people of Judah, in their time. I’ve divided it into four sections, largely to make it easier to work our way through. The first section is from verses 1 to 4, and I’ve simply called this section “Another Child.” Let’s read it:

“<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD said to me, ‘Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, “Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”’<sup>2</sup> And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me.’<sup>3</sup> And 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;<sup>4</sup> for before the boy knows how to cry “My father” or “My mother,” the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.’”

So you’ve got in your previous chapter the promise of the child born of the virgin—God with us. But don’t forget, in the previous chapter, the point was made that Isaiah had a son called “The remnant will return.” Well now Isaiah has another son. And if you’re wondering what Maher-shalal-hash-baz means, it means “the spoil speeds; the prey hastens.” The spoil speeds; the prey hastens. What does that mean?

Well, what's the prediction that Isaiah made? He predicted that the king of Assyria was coming. But there's a little bit more depth to this. Back in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 19, if you remember when we looked at Isaiah chapter 5, the people were here described as being hard of heart and ignorant. We'll start reading at verse 18. Isaiah is pronouncing woe.

<sup>18</sup> Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes,  
<sup>19</sup> who say: ‘Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!’” What those unbelieving people are doing is challenging God. What they're saying to Isaiah is, “All right, if God's really judging—when? When's it going to happen? Let it happen. Bring it on. Show us. You say that we're sinning. You say that Yahweh is displeased with His people. Okay, when? Where? Where's the judgment?”

Now have a look at the name that Isaiah gives to this child who is born. The name is “the spoil speeds; the prey hastens.” You see the reference back—the play on words. The Lord is saying through Isaiah, “You asked for me to bring it on? You said you want to see it? Well, you're going to see it. In the life of this child, you're going to see it. Judgment is indeed coming on, and it's coming on quickly. It's hastening. Your people, your nation, your countryside will be prey and spoil.”

So first of all, Isaiah is told, “Take a large tablet and write this name upon it: Maher-shalal-hash-baz—the spoil speeds; the prey hastens.” Then Isaiah fathers a child, and he gives the child the same name. He gives the child the same name. “Judgment is coming.” The arrogance of the people of Judah is to be judged, it is to be crushed. This child is the child of judgment—judgment now, for the people now.

The next section is verses 5 to 10, and I've called it “Dirty Water and Human Vanity.” But the word of Immanuel stands. Let's just read it: <sup>5</sup>The LORD spoke to me again: <sup>6</sup>‘Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently...’ Now what's that—“the waters of Shiloah that flow gently”? Well, it's actually referred to in the gospel of John chapter 9. Remember that the blind man was sent in the healing to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. It means “sent”. This is the water supply. Isaiah is saying that this is the water supply that God has put in place for Jerusalem. It was a stream that started from a spring in the hills behind and above Jerusalem—the ancient city of Jerusalem. And through a slow-moving stream and various pools and rapids, it brought water into the city.

What God is saying here is, the people have refused the water that He has provided—a clear, fresh stream of water that brings them life and blessing. And in refusing the clear, fresh, clean spring of water, they've taken for themselves out-of-control, dirty floodwaters. They “rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah...” Now what's that? Remember, Ahaz has done a deal with the king of Assyria, and the king of Assyria has invaded and defeated Syria and Samaria. And they're rejoicing over the defeat of those two smaller kingdoms to the north. You know, “Yea! Ahaz, what a great decision! Ahaz, what a leader! He formed an alliance with Assyria just when things were at their worst, and now our northern enemies have been crushed!”

Isaiah's saying, "You're rejoicing over the power of that kingdom Assyria, are you? You're rejoicing over what they've done. You're saying, 'Wow, now we've gotten help! We've gotten help from the world! We've got powerful friends, now.'"

Well..., <sup>7</sup> therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, <sup>8</sup> and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." The River referred to there is the Euphrates River. This is the area that will become Babylon, and then from that moment on, that word "Babylon" comes to represent the evil of human society—the world, rebelling against God.

God is saying that because Ahaz has turned to these people for his help, because he has turned to them and formed this worldly alliance, they're coming. They're coming! They're going to come like a flood. They'll sweep on even past Syria, and they'll sweep on even past Ephraim, or the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They'll sweep into Judah itself, and there'll be nothing above that water but the neck. "And its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land."

So it's not actually saying that Assyria itself will destroy Judah. Assyria doesn't destroy Judah. Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon is the nation that will destroy Judah, in years to come—150 or so years into the future. But what God is saying is, "You're going to suffer. You've formed an alliance with Assyria. They're going to come into your land, they're going to isolate you, they're going to take away the land around you and the spoil around you—the things that you think make you comfortable and wealthy. I'll leave Jerusalem standing for the time being." It's like the flood waters running over a person's body, and the head and the neck are just above the water. That's the picture that Isaiah is painting.

But look at the end of verse 8: "...reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." O Immanuel. Now think back to Isaiah chapter 7, and the predicted child who is coming, the offspring of the virgin. Who is coming? The offspring of the virgin—the Messiah, the Saviour. And His name would be Immanuel, God with us. And now Isaiah is speaking to and of Immanuel, as though He already lives—"will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."

Jesus didn't come into existence when He was born. Or I should put that another way—The Son of God did not become the Son of God when He was born. The Son of God is uncreated. The Son of God is as eternal as God the Father. The Son of God is co-equal, co-eternal, truly God. The Lord Jesus Christ has always been the eternally begotten Son of the Father.

So Isaiah can speak to Immanuel, even before Immanuel took upon Himself flesh and became the man Jesus, son of Mary. He can speak to Him because he is speaking to God. Immanuel is just as much Isaiah's God Yahweh as the Father is Isaiah's God Yahweh. And Isaiah can say that this land is Yahweh's land, this land is Immanuel's land. So it's kind of a lament. "Look what is happening, O Immanuel! The evil ones have come into your land. Your people are barely surviving."

Let's keep reading. Verse 9: "<sup>9</sup> Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. <sup>10</sup> Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us"—but it actually says, "for Immanuel"—"it will not stand, for Immanuel, God, is with us."

Now what's Isaiah saying? What's happening here? Well first of all, he's throwing out a challenge, or in a way, it's an ironic statement. He's throwing out a challenge to those who are attacking Judah. "Strap on your armor. Come. Do the things that you have been called to do. You think you're mighty? You think you're going to make us pay? Come." But—"be shattered." Be shattered. Take your counsel, but it will come to nothing.

You see, the people who are attacking Judah, which is at this point in time the church—the visible church, the kingdom of God—they hate God. And they think that in attacking Judah, they are putting down God, who is in heaven. They're idolaters. They're worshippers of evil. They're sacrificers of children. All of the evil practices that are spoken of in the Scripture were carried out and practiced in this kingdom called Assyria.

And Assyria thinks that by attacking the people of God, they are indeed attacking God. And Isaiah says, "You'll do what has been ordained that you will do. God will use you indeed to punish His people for their disobedience. But don't imagine that you're going to succeed in the long run. Don't imagine that you're going to be mighty and that your kingdom will live forever. Don't boast. Don't boast of your power and your greatness. You will be shattered." God will use them to accomplish His purposes, and then He will destroy them. He will judge them for their evil and their wickedness.

God ordains all things. God ordains the movements of all nations and peoples—then, and now. And these enemies who come to attack the people of God and think they're going to succeed—there's an echo here of Psalm 2. Just turn quickly to Psalm 2. Psalm 2 speaks of the conspiracy of the peoples, or the imaginations of the peoples. Reading from verse 1:

"<sup>1</sup> Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup> 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' <sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision." They can plot, they can boast, they can plan, they can think that they are mighty and they're powerful. They can take counsel together. "The peoples plot in vain." They can take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. They can speak their words, but it will not stand, for God is with us. It will not stand—Immanuel. For, Immanuel—because God—is saving His remnant. God is saving His remnant from a people.

The nations are not out of control. The nations have never been out of control. God, through His providence, is running the nations of the earth according to His will. When the covenant people of Judah were being attacked by heathen and pagan nations around them and were losing those battles, things weren't out of control. It was according to the will of God. His word stands. No matter how weak and insignificant His people seem to be, His word stands. He is building His church. His purposes will be accomplished. Why? "For God is with us." We have the Immanuel. We have a Saviour—a Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I look at the world, and I can tell you, on a human level, I think the world's gone insane. I think it's crazy. I think stupidity is being legislated. I think evil is being legislated, left, right, and center. I think, you know, the fools, the madmen are running the asylum. That's the way it is. And it will not stand. The peoples plot in vain. The kings of the earth set themselves, the rulers take counsel together. It will not stand. Why? "For God is with us." Immanuel. He's building His church.

Let's look at the next section, verses 11 to 15. My subtitle, "The Fear of God Preserves God's People." Now once again, in verse 11, Isaiah says, "the LORD spoke thus to me"—this is the third time in our passage that he says, "the LORD spoke to me." <sup>11</sup> For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: <sup>12</sup> 'Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. <sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.'"

So God's word to Isaiah is this: The things that the people fear, the things that the people are calling conspiracies, the nations gathering against Judah—Do not fear. Do not fear the things that the peoples fear. There is no value in fearing the things that the people fear. The result of their fears was, what? That Ahaz formed an alliance with heathen, pagan nations; that Ahaz dirtied Judah by associating the God of Judah with the gods of Assyria. Remember, this was Ahaz, who brought that pagan altar into the temple precincts and moved the altar of the Lord away so that the pagan altar could be there.

So that's the result of this fear of conspiracy. I mean, we've met people—you know, they're worried, there's conspiracies going on—illuminati, and you know, the Table of the Nations, and the EU, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't doubt that there's conspiracies. The Bible tells me to expect conspiracies. We've read Psalm 2. It tells me that the nations rage, and peoples plot in vain. I'm sure there's conspiracies. And they're trying to get evil people in power. I'm sure they are. And they like abortion because abortion is human sacrifice. I'm sure that's true.

I don't doubt that any of those things are true. I'm sure there's conspirators the world over, and they all think that they run the world, and that by their dirty money and their backroom deals and their nasty negotiations—they all think that they're running the world and that they're going to make things go the way they want them to go. I couldn't care less. I'm not even remotely interested. Why? Because Scripture tells me what the Lord's approach to this is. "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision"—from Psalm 2, again.

God has a plan. God doesn't care. They themselves are actually plotting according to His will, plotting according to His plan. They think they're rebelling against God. Now, on a moral basis, they are rebelling against God. They're rebels against the revealed will of God. They're evil. They're wicked. They're rebelling against the living God in heaven. But in terms of God's secret will of decree, the will by which He runs all providence, they're doing exactly what they

were made to do, because God is going to reveal His glory in making their plans come to nothing, and making the mighty look like the evil, self-centered, little fools that they are.

So, yeah—the media is in a conspiracy. All they want to promote is the left-wing, and all they want to promote is the nonsense, the dribble, and the propaganda. It's true. And God's word will prevail. Why? Because God has spoken. His will is being accomplished, even as we speak.

Now in saying that, am I saying that you should swallow, hook, line, and sinker, the drivel that comes from the world? Of course not. That's not what I'm saying. Of course you should look for the clean water. Of course you should look for the gentle waters that God Himself provides, the streams of living water. Of course. Of course you should study the word of God and use it as your standard to compare all the nonsense and evil that's going on in the world. Of course.

But what I'm saying is, Don't worry about the plotting of the world. Don't worry about the plotting of evil people. What I'm saying is, Be obedient to God in the things that God has revealed. Do all that you can to bring about the strengthening of the kingdom of God, because that's the commission that we've been given in this earth—to obey Christ, to obey His commands, to be used by Him to build His church. Let the plotters plot. It's not going to work.

<sup>“</sup><sup>12</sup> do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup> But the LORD,” or “But Yahweh of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” My friends, the one we're to fear is God. We're to worry about obeying God. And Scripture tells us what the difference between fearing God and fearing man is. If you'll turn to Matthew chapter 10, we'll start reading at verse 26. Now Jesus is sending out His disciples with a mission to preach.

<sup>“</sup><sup>26</sup> ‘So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.’”

So what's being said here? Don't fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul, back at verse 28. “Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Who casts people into hell? Who's the judge? Jesus—correct. God is the judge. There's a lie, and many lies I guess being taught. One of the lies being taught is that hell is the absence of the presence of God. No. Hell is the eternal presence of God in judgment and wrath. It's the eternal presence of God's anger. It's the eternal presence of God's righteous justice. Jesus says, Don't fear the people of the world. Don't fear them at all. Fear God. Fear God.

Now the application of this comes out in verses 32 and 33. How is it known whether or not a person fears God or man? How is it known? It's known by the words that come out of our mouth. <sup>“</sup><sup>32</sup> ‘So everyone who acknowledges me’—that's Jesus—‘before men, I also will

acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,<sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.””

So who are the ones that fear God in this world? The ones who acknowledge Jesus before men. The one who acknowledges Jesus before those who are evil and would try to silence the gospel and rebel against God. Speaking God’s word, holding fast the good confession—that’s the application of how one is to fear God. And not acknowledging God, not giving glory to God, not giving glory to Jesus, not speaking the truth about salvation in Christ—that’s fearing man, and fearing the plotting and the conspiracies of man. We’re to fear God—God alone. And He is to be held as holy, honored as holy, in our hearts. He’s to be our fear. And let Him be your dread.

Verse 14 of Isaiah chapter 8: “<sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel.” So note here that what’s being said of God, which Peter and others applied to Christ—He will be a sanctuary. For whom? For those who fear Him. He will be a sanctuary for those who fear Him, for those who honor Him as Lord in their hearts. To those people, He will be a sanctuary. But to those who do not, what will He be? What will He be? “a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

Now I don’t think here is a promise of whether or not God’s people are going to survive the coming invasion of Babylon. I don’t think God is here saying that His people won’t be taken captive. What He’s saying is that those who sanctify Yahweh in their hearts, those who are truly faithful—even though they will be taken captive, even though the world will do with them as it pleases—to those people, God is their sanctuary. Though they be taken to Babylon, they will be worshippers of God.

Think of Daniel and his three friends. Though they be amongst idolaters, they will be worshippers of the true God. Think of Esther and Mordecai. Those who have set Yahweh as holy in their hearts, they won’t stumble. They won’t stumble in their faith. The promises are the promises of eternal life.

And yet, for those who are not true worshippers in their hearts, the very fact that they are the people of God, the very fact that they’re people who had entered into a covenant with God, becomes a stumbling stone. They’ll be broken; they’ll be snared; they’ll be taken. They’ll be taken away. They’ll be taken into Babylonian captivity. And in Babylonian captivity, what will they become? Babylonians. They’ll become idolaters and worshippers of the god of Babylon. When in Scripture the remnant does return, it’s only a remnant.

Let’s just throw some numbers up. If three million people went captive into Babylon, well, it tells us that only about 100,000 came back to Jerusalem as the faithful remnant. Those who did not set or honor Yahweh as holy in their hearts became Babylonians. They adopted the gods of the people around them. They worshipped as did the people around them. They were separated from Yahweh. “Many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken.”

Now the final section, verses 16 to 22, is more about this division. Note the point of division is whether or not a person has set Yahweh as holy in their heart, or honored Yahweh as holy in their heart—whether or not a person fears Yahweh. So for the remainder of the chapter now, we're looking at a difference between those who are faithful and those who are not faithful.

Starting at verse 16: “<sup>16</sup> Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. <sup>17</sup> I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup> Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.”

Notice what's being said here: “Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples.” “Among my disciples”—whose disciples? Well, Isaiah as a prophet would have been prophesying to, or preaching to, faithful believers. And those faithful believers who are accepting and believing the word of God through Isaiah are God's disciples. “Seal the teaching among my disciples” seems to be suggesting the idea of, “Confirm it to my disciples; say that it is true.” And yet, this testimony is going to be bound up and sealed. What does that also speak of? It speaks of judgment—future judgment.

So what's going on here? Isaiah has written this passage of prophecy, and it has now been sealed, so that at a later date, when this happens, the people of God can open that prophecy and see that God has done exactly as He said He would do. And the disciples, God's people, will be confirmed in their faith.

Let's keep reading. Verse 17—“I will wait for the Lord.” “<sup>17</sup> I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup> Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.” There's two voices speaking there, in a way. There's Isaiah speaking, and we know from Hebrews chapter 2 that there's Jesus speaking. The Son, the Immanuel, the God-with-us is speaking through Isaiah.

Isaiah has children. We know that he has one child called “the remnant will return.” We know that he has another child, called “the spoil speeds, and the prey hastens.” He has his own children. He also has disciples—they're, in effect, his spiritual children. There are faithful people listening to his teaching and obeying God. And they're a sign against who? They're a sign against those who are not faithful. They're portents—portents. They speak of something that's going to happen.

Verse 19. Now here are the people who won't listen to the testimony, who won't hear that teaching that is sealed to the disciples. “<sup>19</sup> And when they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?’” These are the faithless. These are the idolaters. These are the practitioners of the occult. They don't go to a prophet, one of God's prophets for teaching. They don't want to hear the word of the prophet. What is the word of the prophet? It's that Yahweh is holy, you are sinners, repent! It's not a popular message, is it? It never has been. They'd rather go to fortune tellers, card-readers, you name it—tea-leaf readers, entrail readers, whatever you want.

"Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" It's kind of a stupid idea, isn't it? Go and inquire of the dead. What's the good of the dead? If you could speak to them, what do they know? What can they tell you? What would they have to say? If they were holy and saved, if they're in the presence of the Lord, they've got nothing to say to you. Why would they want to? If they were sinners, they're just as blind as they ever were. And if you are a sinner who wants to practice the occult and speak to the dead, you're not going to get anything but lies and foolishness.

Verse 20: "To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn." To the teaching and to the testimony! To God's word! If they will not speak according to God's word, it is because they have no dawn—that is, no light, no hope, no future. There's no light at the end of this tunnel for those who are inquiring from the occult, those who are inquiring of evil spirits and false teachers. They're in darkness.

Verse 21. This is once again referring to the people who will not hear the word of God: <sup>“21</sup> They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. <sup>22</sup> And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness."

So "they will pass through the land." Now you've got to think of some of the promises that were given when God gave His law. When God gave His law, what was the promise? "That you may dwell long in the land that the Lord your God has given you." The obedient people of God had a promise that they could live in the presence of God in the promised land. But the disobedient—they pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry.

What were the further promises of God concerning the faithful and the obedient? They would be living in a land—in the book of Exodus for example—of milk and honey. Their crops would not fail, their cattle would not miscarry. A land of plenty. But these disobedient ones, they won't live in the land, they're just passing through the land. And they will be hungry. They won't get fed from, by, and through the land. They won't get the food that is God's word. They won't be fed by God. They're not going to be cared for providentially. They're going to be starving. They will become angry, "enraged, speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward."

Isaiah's basically saying that when they hear from someone like Isaiah telling them that it's time to repent and turn to the living God, they're going to raise their faces to the sky and say, "I curse Him! Don't want to know Him! Hate Him! If there's a living God, why do all these things go wrong? Why is so much bad stuff happening?"

For example, I heard an atheist guy say on a radio show—"If there's a God, why wouldn't everybody get better and nobody die?" Well, if there's no God, how do you know that people being ill and dying is a bad thing, is the question I would have come straight back at him with. We won't worry about that. They hate God. They try to blame God for everything. They curse the knowledge of God.

Then it says in verse 22: “And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.” Now that’s setting us up for chapter 9 and the coming of the great light—the Son; the Son given. They look to the earth. Having cursed God, they look to the earth for their light, and all they get is darkness. Having refused to receive the word of God, they look for the wisdom of the world, and all they get is darkness.

There is no hope for the wicked. There is no peace for the wicked. There is no joy in the life of an unbeliever. Why do you think the atheists are so angry? They’ve got nothing to be happy about. The things that they pursue for pleasure—well, eventually, those things destroy their own body. They destroy the people who practice them. There’s nothing good enough, there’s nothing pleasing enough to keep them eternally happy and satisfied. They’ve always got to seek for something more, something more intense. There is no peace, no happiness, no contentment for the wicked.

Now that’s our passage. And as I’ve said, it’s quoted in the New Testament, or quotations are taken from this passage in the New Testament. How is it used in the New Testament? In First Peter, it’s used to refer us to God’s people in the world. God’s people—the church in the world, the troubled world attacking the church; Christians coming under the pressure of persecution. And look at what God had said to His people of Judah: There would be a people who honor Him as holy. The Lord of Hosts, Him you shall honor as holy. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your bread. And to those people, the Lord will be a sanctuary. And so Peter quotes the passage.

In Hebrews, the passage is also quoted. In the book of Hebrews, the author starts out with a discussion, or an argument, concerning the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, pointing out that He’s greater than men, greater than angels, greater than Moses. Let’s have a look at Hebrews, chapter 2, starting at verse 1:

“<sup>1</sup> Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

Now what’s he saying there? The message to this group of people—whom we’ve simply been told little more than that they’re the Hebrews—was, Do not be tempted to neglect this salvation that you have in Christ. The Hebrews were tempted to step back from the heat of the kitchen, so to speak. Imagine you’re of Jewish descent. You hear the preaching of the apostles, and you hear the preaching of the evangelists, appointed by the apostles. You convert to Christianity, and suddenly, all your friends in the Jewish quarter of town who used to speak to you, won’t speak to you, and they treat you as though you’re a dead person. And the children no longer play with the Jewish children. They’re treated as though they’re the offcasts of the world, the unclean ones.

Imagine that it's becoming now clear to the Roman rulers that Christians are not Jews. This is not just a sect of the Hebrew religion, this is a whole other religion all of its own, and they will not do duty, or give honor to Caesar. And so you're starting to suffer the beginnings of the persecution that's coming.

Then you look at how your religion is practiced. You meet in houses and places where there's no adornment. It's not beautiful. We're all just normal folk, normal people. You don't have a priest opulently dressed. You don't have a temple filled with gold fittings. You don't have the comforts of being a member of a recognized religion under the Roman system. It's all plain. It's all without ostentation. It's all very ordinary, and every-day, and you're rubbing shoulders with people whom once you would never have rubbed shoulders with—for example, Gentiles. What would be the temptation?

Well, the Jewish religion worshipped the living God, and the Christian religion is the worship of the living God. And well, seeing as though it's so much easier to be a Jew. Why don't we just slip back into temple worship? Why don't we just slip back into Jewish practice? We'll still be worshipping the living God. We know that it's Jesus—we understand all that, but we'll still be worshipping the living God.

And the author of the Hebrews is saying to them, "No, no. This is something completely different—new, better, so much greater. Your Saviour is God Himself." That's the argument of Hebrews chapter 1. The Saviour of the church, the Redeemer of the church, is the divine, holy, Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You've been redeemed by God Himself. And so he warns them—"Do not slip away. Do not drift back into your former Jewish life. It will not be good for you. You will suffer."

And then he starts to speak to them about who saved them, down at verse 5. It was not angels. "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking." Now why would he say that? Because the Christian teaching is that Christ is upon the throne. The world has been subjected to Him. Christ has ascended on high. He's saying, "It's not an angel that ascended on high. It's God, the Son of God. This is why you can't drift back into Jewish worship. He runs all things."

Move down to verse 8: "Now in putting everything in subjection to him," that's Christ, "he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.<sup>9</sup> But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.<sup>10</sup> For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.<sup>11</sup> For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,<sup>12</sup> saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.'<sup>13</sup> And again,"—now here's our quote from Isaiah—"I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold, I and the children God has given me.'"

The author of Hebrews is taking the message of Isaiah chapter 8 and he's applying it to the New Covenant people of God—to the worshippers of Christ. And he's saying, "Just as Yahweh,

through the teaching of Isaiah, saved a people who sanctified Yahweh as holy in their hearts, he saved them through their faith. So that no matter what happened—the coming judgments of God—no matter what happened, they were safe. Yahweh was to them a sanctuary.” Well now he’s saying, “You have been saved by Yahweh incarnated—the Lord Jesus Christ. And just as the Old Covenant people had to sanctify Yahweh as holy in their hearts,” he’s saying, “you must now hold Christ as holy in your hearts, worshipping Christ, and you will be the children that God has given Christ. You will be the children of Yahweh.”

You see what he’s saying—he’s saying that the people of Yahweh, spoken of under the Old Covenant, are one and the same as the people of Christ, spoken of under the New Covenant. He’s saying, “Don’t go back. There’s nothing to go back to. You can’t go back. There’s nothing to go back to, because Yahweh Himself has been revealed to you as your Saviour—in, through, and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see the continuity of God’s dealing with people. It’s always been the same. What’s required? Faith. What’s required? True worship, based on a faith from the word of God, knowing God for who He is, loving God, obeying God—not listening to the nations rage, the peoples plotting in vain; not worrying about the conspiracies of the world.

Yeah, I know, they’re evil. And in this democracy that we live in, we should take advantage of all that we’re given—letters to our local members, we should be active, we should be proclaiming. But our sanctuary is God. Our safety is God. The place where we gather is in Christ. It’s not a building, it’s a person—the Lord Jesus Christ.

I’m not saying abandon the world. It’s Christ’s world. He didn’t tell us to abandon the world. He didn’t tell us to circle the wagons and forget about everything. He told us to conquer the world, with and for and by the gospel. But what I am saying is that we should not fear the machinations of the world, we should not fear the works of Satan, we should not fear the things that are trying to stand and turn against us. No. Fear God. Fear God, the living God. Speak of Christ. Acknowledge Christ before men as Saviour. We’ll close there.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you that you are our God, that you are our sanctuary, that though the peoples plot in vain and the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed, that you hold them in derision; you hold them in contempt. You have spoken, and your will will be. Abiding in Christ, the living word, with our thoughts conformed to your written word, we are safe. We have a fortress, we have a strong tower, and we need not fear the world. We thank you and praise you for these things. In Jesus’ name. Amen.