Redemption Stone

**Isaiah 8:9–15** 9 “Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; And give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered; Gird yourselves, yet be shattered. 10 “Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted; State a proposal, but it will not stand, For God is with us.” 11 For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, 12 “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. 13 “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. 14 “Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 “Many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught.”

“We know ourselves now to be on a fast-moving train hurtling down the tracks, and it is absurd to think that by leaning over the side and digging our heals into the ground we could have the slightest effect on the train’s velocity. People sense this. Many do. There is a panic in the culture because we know our era is ending. Our horror movies are not just stories. They are a kind of mirror of ourselves. They surface the inchoate sense that we have, the sense of dread, the sense that all is not right in our world, that out there is a lurking menace whom we cannot see. We intuitively feel that a terrifying calamity looms over us, but we just do not quite understand what this is or even where it is.” (David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind, How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014) 31-32).

These words help to capture the collective conscience of the nation of Judah at a time in its history when they too had an “inchoate sense… the sense of dread” that their time was “ending.” But to demonstrate that He is the God of all creation, that He, not any other cosmic power, nation, king, or mental safety net, was Creator, Redeemer and Consummator of all things; the true King of Israel is also the Revealer. He alone held their times in His omnipotent hand. To illustrate this about Himself and to provoke His people to faith, God reveals the redemption stone, a stone of offense, and stone that will either be for refuge or for retribution. Isaiah sets out three crucial factors here in the outworking of God’s sovereign plan. In the course of the history of redemption the remnant will be protected, God’s revelation will be discerned and the Redeemer will be foretold.

*The Remnant Protected*

In a sense the following part of this oracle is a taunt to wicked nations which God himself ordains to come against His wayward people (cf. 10.5ff.). Remarkably, they believe that the unfolding of the historical events represented here will be something they control. However, as they plan and conspire against Judah they do the bidding of God and His sovereign decree. Even as in our own day, the nations who persecute the Church believe they are bringing their own sinister plans to pass and yet, even in the midst of doing that, they may come to certain political, theological or sociological justifications for their actions, but *God* is the One who has ordained the suffering of His people and even uses the suffering of His people as the very occasion that will ensure the destruction of God’s enemies:

**Philippians 1:27–29** 27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

One commentator on Philippians said, “it is God who sends the persecutions they must undergo, the solid resistance with which they must confront them, and the assurance of salvation which follows” (see, Peter T. O’Brien, Philippians, NIGTC, 157). Taken from the context of Isaiah here, there is something *eschatological* going on here. It is not merely the brokenness of Judah and Israel that the reader must be concerned with, but something more extensive more cosmic is at work here, “give ear, all the remote places of the earth” (v.9). It’s as if what is presently unfolding in Israel’s history will have universal ramifications for the world. Of course, due to the prophetic nature of Judah’s demise, that is precisely what these series of events is unleashing in the world. An all determining prophetic work that will result in the either the deliverance of those who, through faith, trust in the provisional promises of God, or those who will be destroyed by stumbling over the prophetic word. The entire ministry of the Messiah will be bound to this prophetic work of judgment or salvation (cf. Mt. 21.42-44). That is what the preaching of the “kingdom” is all about.

At this point, the nations may take up their cause against God’s kingdom and yet they will “be shattered” (חתת). Israel and Syria may indeed plot and plan, they may gird themselves for battle (which is what the metaphorical language reflects) but they will be “thwarted” and their plans “will not stand” because God is with His people now and forever. The principle of *Immanuel* will ensure that God’s faithful remnant will endure. In the NT, the principle at work here in the history of redemption finds organic expression in Paul’s theology of *election*. Like Isaiah, Paul also sees the sovereign protection of God over His faithful remnant so that like in Isaiah’s own day, God’s people will endure even through a litany of afflictions. Nothing can ultimately spell an end to the people of God because “God is with us.” That means that He alone is in full control of our future destiny in this world— come what may:

**Romans 8:31–39** 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The protection of the remnant is not merely the response of spontaneous events throughout redemptive history, it part and parcel of a greater strive, a messianic strive, and cosmic struggle that goes back to original conflict in the Garden between the serpent and the Seed (Gen. 3.15). All of the hostility leveled against the people of God is owing to this deeper divide between the principalities and powers which are undergirded by satanic influence (Eph. 6.12). In OT we may see this messianic connection in the kingdom Israel and the Davidic king:

**Psalm 2** 1 Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!” 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, 6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.” 7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ ” 10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. 11 Worship the Lord with reverence And rejoice with trembling. 12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

*The Revelation Discerned*

To emphasize the slow moving promises of God here in the book of Isaiah, the historical details being developed here spanning many generations; we must note that the remnant’s deliverance would not be of a supernatural or abrupt and miraculous intervention, but through the centuries as the people remain faithful to the promises, God’s protection would be providential, steady, and woven into the complexities of the nation’s history and spiritual upheavals both good and bad. Like the “the gentle flowing waters of Shiloah” God’s presence among His people may seem inconspicuous, but as the years role on, God never leaves himself without witness, without a remnant (1.9, 27; 4.2; 6.13 cf. Rom. 9.29). God delivers His people while simultaneously working out all of His eternal decrees which include the destruction of the wicked so that they will meet the very end to which they were appointed (cf. 1 Pet. 2.8). Thus, it would be imperative for God’s revelation to be properly discerned:

**Isaiah 8:11-13** 11 For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, 12 “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. 13 “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread.

If the remnant is going to be delivered, the revelation of God must be properly discerned. The faithful cannot go along with the status quo opinion on everything; especially not as it pertains to the word of the Lord. When it came to Isaiah’s vision, his prophecy of Immanuel and the impending doom of the nation- the people were to fear the prophetic word for, “the Lord spoke to me mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people” (v.11). Verse 11 introduces what vv.12-13 will go on to clarify. God is calling for a *recognition*, a *separation*, and *conviction* among the people. Several important points come into view here. *First*, the people were to recognize the revelation that came to Isaiah. In this way they would be aligning themselves with God’s authoritative spokesperson. The one whom He has sent with the message of the heavenly council (Isaiah 6). “For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying” (v.11). The phrase, “mighty power” (כְּחֶזְקַ֣ת הַיָּ֑ד) includes the notion of ‘God’s hand’ so that it was God’s powerful hand (though imperceptible without the eye of faith) at work in the prophet to inscribe as it were His very word upon the conscience and heart of Isaiah through vision or dream, through oracle or prophesy. Isaiah’s claim was prophetic and thus, all-authoritative! Failure to take heed to this was tantamount to rejecting God himself resulting in His hand of judgment (cf. 5.24-25).

*Second*, they were to distinguish themselves from popular opinion about the political developments of their day; specifically, that God was at work among them and that God was the solution to all their trouble not Ahaz or the other potential cosmic powers (e.g. Assyria) at work behind the scenes (cf. 7.1-6) and not political maneuvers by the nation’s wicked leaders. The people were also not to trust in the counsel of the state officials even if they resided in the royal courts of the king e.g. Zechariah the priest (v.2). God told Isaiah, “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it” (v.12). This would only be possible through the activity of faith; the very thing Ahaz and those like him lacked; for as Paul tells us, “not all have faith” (cf. 2 Thess. 3.2). At this stage of Judah’s history, as things are developing, as the stakes are heightening, as the prospect of real doom looms on the horizon, and as cultural panic begins to set in on the people; it will be imperative that the remnant discern the prophetic word and trust in God’s promises even in the midst of tribulation. How paradigmatic for us in the coming years, the tribulations we may face.

*Third*, in an act of reverential repentance the people were to sanctify the Lord above all else (cf. 1 Pet. 3.15). What God spoke to Isaiah with a mighty hand of power was that above all else in Isaiah’s counter-cultural ministry it would be the holiness of God that should distinguish him and those who were entrusted to his care (8.18), “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread” (v.13). Isaiah, ‘don’t concern yourself with sounding relevant, or tolerant or sympathetic, or sophisticated, or reasonable, rational, likeable, nice, humble, pragmatic, or even “loving”; as it pertains to the holiness of God, sound like you fear me above all else irrespective of the consequences! This too will “render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull and their eyes dim” so that they will not repent (6.10)! Because the people have lost sight of God’s holiness, God’s gravity, and God’s terrible deeds that He has wrought among them, with the loss of God’s holiness went the purity of their worship:

**Isaiah 1:13–15** 13 “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. 14 “I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

And so the people were to live as though they dreaded God. Their lives were to run contrary to popular opinion and regulated religion. Above all else, the culture should look in upon the Church and exclaim that these are those who regard God as holy. I would venture to say that this may be the attribute that is least vulnerable to the whims and fanciful imaginations of man. They may twist the love, power, sovereignty, and knowledge of God; but His holiness, who would dare to diminish?

*The Redeemer Foretold*

The paradoxical nature of Christianity will always be present in this world and as long as the natural man tries to discern the nature of God and the Christian faith with a darkened mind, they will never understand the things of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2.14-16). The fear of God is among the most baffling parts of Christianity to the watching world. They cannot understand how fearing God and loving God go together. But in the fear of the Lord there is a “sanctuary” of hope, a temple of wisdom, a refuge of safety, and the mystery of fellowship with God:

**Psalm 25:12–15** 12 Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. 13 His soul will abide in prosperity, And his descendants will inherit the land. 14 The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant. 15 My eyes are continually toward the Lord, For He will pluck my feet out of the net.

The *fear* and the *fellowship* are precisely why this word of deliverance will continue to represent a twofold reality of *sanctuary* or *snare*. In fact, Isaiah’s stumbling “stone” constitutes a very elaborate theology that moves from OT prophecy to NT fulfillment surrounding the person and work of Messiah (28.16; Ps. 118.22-23; Mt. 21.42-44; Mk. 12.10-11; Lk. 20.17-18; Acts 4.11-12; 1 Pet. 2.6 (also v.4, ‘a living stone’); also Rom. 9.32-33; Eph. 2.20-22). Jesus tapped into this very stream of Messianic prophecy surrounding this rock of offense in order to show the fulfillment of such prophesies in His own person and work. In the Parable of the Landowner, Jesus issues an indictment on the nation of Israel who stumbled over the Messiah and thus had the kingdom taken away from them:

**Matthew 21:42–44** 42 Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

Ahaz and the majority of the nation (both Israel and Judah, v.14) at this time thus constitute a typological group of people, representing unbelieving Israel as well as every individual that does not take refuge in the Messiah, who will perish because of their willful rejection of offer of salvation. Furthermore, it will be Peter who really ties the whole biblical theology of this stumbling stone together to show the universal scope of the both the promise and the threat of Isaiah’s initial prophecy (Peter cites all OT references to the messianic stumbling “stone” Ps. 118.22-23, Is. 8.14-15; 28.16). Peter gives us the fullest and richest teaching on this issue in the NT and its redemptive significance for the new covenant Church. This is really a masterful piece of apostolic theology of the biblical theology of Christ and the Church, the Corner Stone and the living stones respectively:

**1 Peter 2:4–10** 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone,” 8 and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter connects both Ps. 118 and Isaiah 8, and 28 because of the common theme of refuge. In fact, what Isaiah envisions here is God as a sanctuary, God as a refuge, a temple for His people so that they might find safety and repose in His presence. What Isaiah may not have fully understood is what Peter is now teaching in that, our part in God’s sanctuary is not just by proximity; we actually comprise the temple complex, “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house” (v.5 cf. Zech. 6.12-15). Thus, we take refuge in God as our sanctuary as we enter into union with Him through Jesus Christ. Christ being the “stone” or as Peter puts it, “a choice stone, a precious corner stone”; He is the key to salvation. Only in Union with Christ will the remnant be delivered and defended from all adversaries so that nothing will separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8.39). Taken as a whole, what Peter is telling us is that Isaiah’s “stone” is to be tested, stricken and afflicted in order to become the head of the corner.

Peter is thus saying that what God communicated to Isaiah in power and might was touching on the dual estates of Christ; tested and stricken in His active obedience and death, and exalted to the head of the corner in His subsequent glories (53.12; 1 Pet. 1.10-11). He who would be a trap for the wicked would also be a temple for His people. Thus, Isaiah here envisions the whole scope of the Redeemer’s work. That is what is being typified in the present historical drama. It was a drama that pointed to a greater drama, a saga that pointed to a greater saga— the saga of the Savior, the true Immanuel.

Peter says, “This precious value, then, is for you who believe” (v.7a). This entire messianic theology is a confrontation, a crisis of faith. Like Ahaz, will we refuse the sign of the Lord and perish? Will we chalk it all up to “conspiracy” and religious quackery in unbelief? Or like Isaiah and his disciples, will we trust and treasure the precious stone who was tested for us so that when we are tested, when we pass through judgment, our faith may result in praise and glory (cf. 1 Pet. 1.7) having been found in Him as in a temple in the Spirit (cf. Eph. 2.19-22)?