

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday December 17th 2006 Isaiah 8:11-22

Every city has a river that feeds it. Shiloh fed Jerusalem, and the Gihon spring rose outside the city. This was symbolic of the Davidic line of kinship, and also an illustration of the need of God's people to trust him. Since the water rose outside the city walls, and flowed in in conduits, this made Jerusalem very vulnerable to attack, because if you captured the water, you captured the city. So trusting in the Lord was the only way to live, because only God could defend the city.

The northern kingdom of Israel had long since ceased to trust God, and had set up its own temple. Now Judah also wavered in its faith in God to defend her. She was beginning to think it would be preferable to make an alliance with Assyria in order to defend her. After all this was real politics, and it would be scandalous to go it alone in such circumstances. But this faithlessness would bring judgement. As we know from the New Testament, friendship with the world is an act of infidelity, an indication of a lack of trust.

The Lord speaks very strongly to Isaiah, that he should be different from those around him. He is not to fear, even in the eye of the storm, for in the midst of judgement there is hope. To those who fear the Lord, He will become a sanctuary – a sanctuary for those who continue to trust in God. You may have to live through the judgement, but it will not affect you. But to those who do not regard Him as holy, He will become a stone over which to stumble, a stumbling-block, someone you keep tripping over. So He is either a sanctuary or a stumbling-block depending on your response to Him. But He cannot be ignored.

In 1 Peter 2:6 it says 'See I lay a cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame – God will be with him.'

There's a choice to be made – and even if you ignore the stone, you are choosing the stumbling-block. Everyone is in the valley of decision – even in your indifference God will be a snare, your undoing.

For the first time in Old Testament history we see the emergence in v.16 of a group of people under Isaiah's leadership, who believe the prophet's message, who cling on to God. This is not institutional religion, but they are defined by the fact that they believe the Word of God. They are people who believed that God speaks. This is a 'Back to the Bible', just as the Roman Empire collapses in decadence and trivia.

Benedict rallied the Christians in the 6th century, not to a fundamentalism, but to be real disciples, who love the Word, who are shaped by the Word, who perform the Word with love and compassion.

And so we bind ourselves to the Book.