

**Advent Reading for Monday, December 4, 2017**  
**“A Sanctuary or a Stumbling Stone”**  
**(Isaiah 8:14)**

Today’s prophetic reading provides a striking contrast of how people responded to the Messiah when He arrived: *“And He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel and Judah, a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall”* (Isaiah 8:14). While the word *sanctuary* can refer to a holy or consecrated place, it is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe a refuge to which one might flee in time of danger, and be safe. Isaiah the prophet found this to be true. And it is true for us; our Lord is the only reliable refuge to whom we can turn, and be eternally safe, secure, and protected.

The contrast becomes clear when we see that others responded to the Messiah, not as a protective sanctuary, but as *a stone that makes men stumble and a rock that makes them fall*.

The first example of Isaiah’s prophecy being fulfilled is when the Apostle Paul described the failure of his fellow Jews to receive God’s righteousness. His explanation is clear: *“Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone”* (Romans 9:32).

A second example is from the Apostle Peter: *“For this is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE CORNERSTONE, A PRECIOUS CORNERSTONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE’, and ‘A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE’; for they stumble because they were disobedient to the word...”* (I Peter 2:6-8). Interestingly, Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, along with today’s verse, Isaiah 8:14.

The difference in the two responses had to do with faith; those who believed were not disappointed, and those who failed to believe *stumbled*. Their disillusionment and unbelief came because Jesus failed to meet their biased expectations.

Interestingly, the Gospels record that the disciples also *stumbled* because of Jesus' hard saying about eating His flesh and drinking His blood: "*Does this cause you to stumble?*" (John 6:61) And because they were offended, "*some of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. Jesus said to the twelve, 'Will you also go away?' Peter responded, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'*" (John 6:66-68). It is unlikely that Peter understood Jesus' puzzling words at this point. What is clear, however, is that Peter was convinced that Jesus had the words of eternal life, and that was all that mattered; further explanations would come later, and Peter could live with that.

In our journey of discipleship, there are certain to be times when Jesus will not meet our expectations. Trials will come for which we have no explanation. Will we stumble, or like Peter, rely on the truths we do know, and leave the unanswered issues for Him to explain later? Jesus may call us to do impossible things, or to become someone we never thought we could become. These are His ways of teaching us to trust Him, even in difficult times.

**Giving Thanks – Thank you that You are worthy of our trust, even during times when we are tempted to stumble.**