

THE IDENTITY OF THE STONE IN ISAIAH 28:16

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Introduction

THE MAJOR concern of Isa 28:14-22 is to to dismiss the pride of the leaders of Jerusalem who think they are secure and have made a “covenant with death” (vv. 15,18). In so doing, Yhwh says that the deceitful refuge of these rulers will fail in the day of calamity (vv. 15,17-18). True security, however, is to be found in the “stone” (אֶבֶן) the “sure foundation,” which he himself will lay in Zion (v. 16). The referent of אֶבֶן (“stone”) imagery has been debated among scholars. Yet, while Isa 28:16 is a difficult text to interpret, it is a central verse within the pericope (vv. 14-22), so that a satisfactory resolution of its internal difficulties is integral to a better understanding of its larger context.

This paper seeks to investigate the identity of אֶבֶן through textual, lexical, syntactical, and contextual analysis of Isa 28:16. It divides into five sections: (a) brief survey of interpretations of אֶבֶן from the NT and Jewish sources, the Church Fathers, and modern scholars; (b) historical and literary contexts; (c) annotated translation v. 16; (d) lexical and syntactical studies; (e) identity of referent of אֶבֶן; and (f) conclusion.

Views about the Identity of אֶבֶן

The NT interprets Isa 28:16 and a combination of several other OT references to “stone” (Exod 17:6; Num 20:7-10; Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14; Dan 2:34-35,44-45; Zech 4:7-10) as referring to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.¹ Several of these OT texts also receive messianic interpretation in Rabbinic Judaism and other Jewish literature,² although Isa 28:16 seems largely neglected.³

¹See Luke 20:17-18 and Matt 21:44 (cf. Ps 118:22; Dan 2:34-35,44-45); Rom 9:32-33 (cf. Isa 8:14; 28:16); 1 Pet 2:4-8 (cf. Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14; 28:16); Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17 (cf. Ps 118:22); Acts 4:11 (cf. Ps 118:22); Rom 10:11 and 1 Tim 1:16 (cf. Isa 28:16b). Other related NT texts include Matt 16:18; Luke 2:34; John 7:37-38; 1 Cor 3:11,12; 10:4; Eph 2:20-22.

²While the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha contain references to “stone,” no messianic interpretation seems to be attached, nor is Isa 28:16 specifically interpreted as such. Interesting references to stone, however, are found in Sirach 6:21; 4 Ezra 5:5; and especially Testament of Solomon 22:7-23:4, where a gigantic keystone is mentioned. Except by the help of the Arabian spirit called Ehippas, no human being could lift this big keystone and place it at the head of the corner to complete the Temple. It is of interest also to note references in the passage to Christ, namely, “one to be born from a virgin and be crucified by the Jews” (22:20)

³Some Jewish sources interpret the “stone” of Dan 2:34-35,44-45 as referring to the Messiah. See Numbers Rabbah 13:14; חרומה הצנאח 13:14; 20 חולדות הצנאח (= Aggadat Bereshit 33a,7); 10 עקב הצנאח and Josephus, Ant 10. 210.

Again, Rabbinic literature refers to the Messiah the stone in Gen 28:18 (חולדות הצנאח 20; Aggadat Bereshit 33a,6), Isa 8:14 (b Sanh 38a), Zech 4:7 (Tg Zech 4:7; Aggadat Bereshit 33a,5), and Zech 4:10 (חולדות הצנאח 20; Aggadat Bereshit 33a,3). In Judaism, messianic interpretation of Ps 118:22 came very late, found first in Rashi on Mic 5:1 (cf. Tg Ps 118:2). References to Tanchumah are taken from J. Jeremias, “lithos,”

In fact, already in the LXX, a Messianic understanding of Isa 28:16 is seen,¹ and this seems to set the tone for the NT interpretation of the text. More specifically, the Targum of Isa 28:16 sees the Messiah in this text and renders “stone” as “king.” This is also true with Targum Zech 4:7 which renders “anointed one” instead of the MT “stone,”² and further suggests the pre-existence of the Messiah. The Qumran community regarded itself as the eschatological Israel or as the true temple of God, citing Isa 28:16 as evidence. While this is not strictly messianic, it has affinity with some NT texts (Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pet 2:5).³

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The NT messianic interpretation of OT references to “stone” becomes more popular in the church fathers, forming a constituent part of their christological interpretation of the OT. Barnabas combines Isa 28:16; 50:17 and Ps 118:22 to prove that Christ is the “stone.”⁵ Justin Martyr also

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:273.

¹LXX reads ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ “the one who believes on him,” suggesting a personal understanding of the text.

²Targum Zech 3:8 translates “anointed one” instead of the MT “branch.” See also Tgs Jer 23:5; 33:15; Isa 4:2; Zech 6:12 and Lam Rab 1:51, all of which translate

³See also Tgs 72:17; Mic 5:1; and b Pes 54a; 1 Enoch 48:3.

⁴See 1QS 8:7-8; 1QH 6:25-27; 7:8-9. The use of Isa 28:16 in these Qumran texts is more figurative.

⁵Epistle of Barnabas 6.2-4.

applies several OT stone texts to Christ (Gen 28:18; Exod 17:12; Josh 5:2-3; Isa 28:16; Dan 2:24).¹ In Cyprian, “stone” is the name for Christ in the OT, citing eleven references including Isa 28:16.² Many other church fathers agree that the “stone” in Isa 28:16 as well as several other stone texts in OT refers to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.³

In modern scholarship, the messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16 has been advocated.⁴ In a related manner, some

¹Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho 34.2; 36.1; 70.1; 76.1; 86.2-3; 90.5; 100.4; 113.6; 114.2,4; 126.1.

²Cyprian Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise 12: Testiminius 2.16-17.

³Tertullian *Against Marcion* 3.7; 5.5,7; idem *An Answer to the Jews* 10,14 (here Christ will be the “highest corner-stone” at his second coming); Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.21.7; Origen *Comm. in Job.* 1.36 and 265; Methodius *Fragments: Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* 6; Acts of Philip: *Of the Journeyings of Philip the Apostle*; *Augustin Letters* 159.5.16; idem *On the Gospel of John* 7.23; idem *On the Psalms* 74.8; idem *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed* 23.43 (Christ is the corner-stone between Jews and Gentiles, joining both parties together); Gregory of Nyssa *On the Baptism of Christ*; *Jerome Letters* 108.13; Gregory of Nazianzen *On the Great Athanasius: Oration* 21.7; Ambrose *Duties of the Clergy* 1.29.141; idem *Of the Christian Faith* 4.5.53; *Aphrahat Demonstrations* I: Of Faith 1.6-8 (Christ “laid his faith in the earth like a foundation,” which sprang up like a great tower [Ps 85:12]).

However, some Gnostics seemed to have linked Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16; and Dan 2:45 with the creation of human beings, particularly the first and last Adam. See Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 2.4.6; 5.7.35-36. In *the Shepherd of Hermas Vision* 3.2-8 (cf. *Similitudes* 3.3-17), a great tower is built with square stones upon waters. The tower represents the Lady, the Church, and the stones represent the apostles and the faithful Christians.

⁴For example, Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol 2: Chapters 19-39 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 284; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 518; J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zonder-

scholars identify אֶבֶן with archetypal Davidic monarchy.¹ Nonetheless, many other scholars object to a messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16, leading to divergent views on אֶבֶן.

Some think it represents God himself,² arguing that in earlier passages (Isa 8:14-15; 26:4) God is the אֶבֶן. The אֶבֶן is also understood to represent Zion, or the city of Jerusalem on its hill.³ These scholars maintain that in the phrase יוֹן בֵּי אֶבֶן, the preposition בֵּי is a beth essentiae, thereby identifying אֶבֶן with Zion. Similarly, some scholars identify אֶבֶן with the Temple in Zion as the refuge for the faithful.⁴ It may even represent the law of God to be revealed in Zion.⁵

Furthermore, some believe that אֶבֶן refers to the saving

van, 1978), 454; G. W. Grogan, "Isaiah," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6: *Isaiah-Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 181.

¹Jan Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 226; S. H. Wadiyapranawa, *The Lord is Saviour: Faith in National Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 171.

²For example, R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, New Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 229; Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah: An Introductory Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 87.

³See Kaiser, 253.

⁴John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 370; J. D. Douglas, ed., "Isaiah," *New Commentary on the Whole Bible based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 927.

⁵Wolfgang Roth, *Isaiah* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 91. For other advocates of this view, see Kaiser, 253.

activity of Yhwh on Zion,¹ while others insist it refers to the relationship between God and his people.² There are also those say that either the community of true believers,³ or remnant,⁴ is in view. Some would even equate אֱבֶרֶךְ with faith,⁵ or the prophetic message itself.⁶ Finally, either king Hezekiah and his rehabilitation of the Temple,⁷ or Yhwh's future building project in Zion may be represented by אֱבֶרֶךְ.⁸ In the light of these numerous proposals, John N. Oswalt says that "perhaps no one identification is correct."⁹ Perhaps this statement justifies the present reinvestigation of the text.

¹See Kaiser, 253.

²See Ibid.

³See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 394. See also Grogan, 181.

⁴See Kaiser, 253 and Grogan, 181.

⁵Kaiser, 254; John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1984), 234; John T. Willis, *Isaiah* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1980), 291.

⁶See Willis, 291; Kaiser, 254.

⁷John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 327-328; Douglas, 927.

⁸See David L. McKenna, *Isaiah 1-39, Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1993), 273.

⁹Oswalt, 518.

Historical and Literary Contexts

There is a considerable amount of consensus on the historical context of Isa 28:14-22. The passage is generally considered as a diatribe against the leaders of Judah who probably engineered an alliance with Egypt against the impending Assyrian campaign (701 B.C.).¹ Page H. Kelly's statement perhaps summarizes the historical setting:

The Assyrian king Sargon II died in 705 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Sennacherib (705-681). This change of rulers triggered a wave of rebellion that spread throughout the Assyrian empire. Judah was drawn into the rebellion when Hezekiah (715-687) attempted to throw off the Assyrian yoke (cf. 2 Kgs 18:7). In taking this course of action he was influenced by a strong pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem, a group of influential leaders who believed that Egypt could be counted on to aid their country in its bid for independence.²

In addition to this probable treaty with Egypt, J. J. M. Roberts points to an "actual, government-sponsored building activity in Jerusalem" to strengthen her fortifications against a siege (cf. 22:8-11; 30:12-15; Mic 3:10).³

¹See Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Judah's Covenant with Death (Isaiah XXIII 14-22)," *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 472-83; Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (England: JSOT Press, 1993), 73; Clements, 229; Watts, 589; Sawyer, 233.

²Page H. Kelly, "Isaiah," *Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 5:Proverbs-Isaiah (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1971), 271.

³J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winnona Lake, 65

Isaiah clearly directs his poetic diatribe¹ against the Judean leaders, calling them scoffers (v. 14). In v. 15, he says that these leaders boast that they have “entered into a covenant with death,” perhaps referring to the alliance with Egypt (cf. 30:2-7; 31:1).² The “covenant with death” is a refuge of “lie” and “falsehood” (v. 15). This refuge cannot resist the “overwhelming scourge,” which is generally understood as the Assyrian attack.³ V. 16, the central verse in the pericope, follows with a divine answer to the plight of Judah: true security cannot be found in alliance with Egypt nor by fortifying the city; rather, security is to be found in the “stone,” the “sure foundation,” which Yhwh will lay in Zion. V. 17a spells out the consequences of Yhwh’s action and vv. 17b-22 elaborate on the uselessness of the “covenant with death.”

IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 307.

¹See also Watts, 366; Roberts, 308. Motyer, 228, however describes Isa 28:1-29 as a “rhythmic prose.”

²For example, Clements, 229; Motyer, 227; Sawyer, 233; Smith, 161; Douglas, 927; John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 319. Cf. Blenkinsopp, “Judah’s Covenant with Death,” 476-78.

³For example, Motyer 233; Youngblood, 87; Miscall, 73; Clements, 229; Smith, 160; Bultema, 263.

⁴Because Isa 28:14-22 is a diatribe, some scholars, for example, Blenkinsopp, “Judah’s Covenant with Death,” 473, do not expect a message of salvation, hence they treat vv. 16-17a as an insertion. However, in Isaiah judgment and salvation are often juxtaposed (1:19-20; 1:21-26; 7:7-9; 29:1-8; 31:4-9). Further, several points illustrate the centrality of v. 16: (a) it is Yhwh’s answer to the problem of Judah; (b) it is bracketed by the references to deceitful refuge (v. 15) and threatened judgment (v. 17b); (c) it forms a necessary transition between vv. 14-15 and 17b-22. Hence, v. 16 is the pivot of the pericope.

Thus, it is clear that Isa 28:14-22 serves to dismiss the attempt of the Judean leaders to achieve national security through foreign alliance and human fortification of Jerusalem instead of relying on God.

Annotated Translation of Isa 28:16

Isa 28:16 may be translated as follows:

Therefore, thus says the Lord Yhwh, ‘behold I am ho founded¹ in Zion a stone,² a tested³ stone, a precious corner(stone)(of)a founded foundation.⁴

¹BHS has the Piel perfect יָסַד “he founded” but other versions read a participle: 1QIsaa has Piel ptc mysd; 1QIsa has *Qal*/ptc יָסֵד; the Peshitto, Targum, and Saadya read a participle; LXX has ἐμβαλῶ (1 sing. fut. act.).

²LXX omits אֶבֶן and replaces it with θεμέλια “foundation.” The Targum reads מֶלֶךְ “king” instead of “stone.”

³LXX reads λίθον πολυτελῆ ἐκλεκτὸν “an expensive choice stone.” Some Greek translations have lithon dokimon “approved stone.” 1QS 8:7-8; 1QH 6:25-27; 7:8-9 seem to read בִּצְרָה “fortress”(?) instead of בִּצְרָה. The Vulgate has lapidem probatum “tested stone,” and the Peshitto reads k’p’ byrt’ “a chosen stone.”

⁴The *zakeph qaton* is above the second word, hence should be read together. The first word, מוֹסֵד, is a noun and the second, מוֹסֵד, is a Hophal participle (indicated by the dagesh forte). LXX deletes the second מוֹסֵד.

Whoever believes¹ will not hasten'.²

Lexical-Syntactical Analysis of Isa 28:16

Some lexical and syntactical considerations are important for the identification of אבן "stone" in Isa 28:16. Phrases to be studied include פנת יקרת מוסד מוסד, אבן בחן, הנני יסד בציון, and המאמין לא יחיש.

הנני יסד בציון

Some scholars have argued that since a participle usually follows הנני (e.g. Isa 13:17; 37:7; 38:18; 43:19), the Piel perfect יסד³ should be revocalized as Qal participle (יֹסֵד),⁴ agreeing thereby with the major versions. This would then make the construction a futurum instans and would translate as "I am

¹LXX reads ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ "the one who believes on him." The Targum reads "the righteous who believe in these things."

²LXX reads οὐ μὴ κατασχευθῇ "shall by no means be ashamed" (cf. Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6). The Targum translates "will not be shaken." The Syriac reads ܠ' ܢܕܠ "not be afraid" and the Vulgate non festinet "not be hasty."

³The word ds;y "lay foundation, found" is mostly architectural. It may refer to the foundation of the Temple (1 Kgs 6:37; Isa 44:28). It also refers to God's laying the foundation of the earth (Isa 48:13) or Zion (Isa 14:32; 54:11).

⁴See for example, Clements, 231; Blenkinsopp, Isaiah, 392; Roberts, 293.

about to lay a foundation.”¹ Nonetheless, since the BHS has the most difficult reading, it seems better to maintain it.²

Further, the use of *ynnh* elsewhere with first person perfect (Jer 44:26; Ezek 25:7; cf. Ezek 34:11,20) and the third person imperfect (Isa 29:14; 38:5) suggests that *dsy ynnh* (Isa 28:16) is not too strange a construction as some would maintain. The perfect *dsy* may be understood as a prophetic perfect, underscoring the certitude of this future action of Yhwh. Perhaps the special emphasis placed on Yhwh’s future action accounts for this unusual construction. The translation “behold I am he who founded” may well capture the change in subject, the perfective aspect, and the full force of the retrospective pronominal suffix.

בְּצִיּוֹן

Some scholars take בְּ in בְּצִיּוֹן as *beth essentiae* and then translate, “I have found Zion as a stone,”³ thus identifying Zion with אֶבֶן. However, it appears that in a *beth essentiae* construction, בְּ is not attached to the direct object of the verb, as it is here.⁴ Both contextually and syntactically, בְּ

¹Roberts, 294.

²W. H. Irwin, *Isaiah 28-33: Translation with Philo-logical Notes* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977), 30, says that the phrase should be taken as a relative clause without a relative particle to account for the change of person.

³Ibid. See also Jensen, 246. Cf. Motyer, 233.

⁴To have a *beth essentiae* construction in Isa 28:16 the phrase should have read צִיּוֹן בְּאֶבֶן, not בְּצִיּוֹן אֶבֶן. See examples in Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winnona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 198; R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*,

cannot be *beth essentiae*. In fact, the phrase בְּצִיּוֹן occurs five more times in Isaiah, all in the locative sense (4:3; 30:19; 31:9; 33:14; 46:13). In this light, בֶּ should be understood in its normal locative sense; the stone is “in Zion.”¹

אבן בחן

The word בַּחֵן occurs only two times in the OT, both found in Isaiah (23:13; 32:14), and has occasioned several proposals regarding its meaning.² It may mean a “touchstone,”³ “testing stone,”⁴ “tested stone,”⁵ or “fortress.”⁶ The root בַּחֵן and its derivatives occur several times in the OT. In many cases, it denotes God’s testing of the human heart (1 Chron 29:17; Jer 11:20; 12:3; 17:10), the righteous (Jer 20:12), or refining a human like gold (Job 23:10; 34:36; Zech 13:9). Consi-

2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976), 45.

¹See also Watts, 367; Young, 286; Alexander, 454.

²For the debate on the etymology of בַּחֵן, see M. Tsevat, “בַּחֵן,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:69-72.

³See Young, 287; Grogan, 182; Wolgan, 92.

⁴See Ridderbos, 226; McKenna, 273; Clements, 231.

⁵Lorin Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership: From Moses to Matthew-Management Lessons for Contemporary Leaders* (New York: Amacom, 2002)

⁶Roberts, 294-98, thinks בַּחֵן derives the Egyptian בַּחֵן “fortress, tower.” He supports this by referring to the use of the radicals bn in Isa 23:13; 32:14 and the use of Isa 28:16 (together 23:13; 32:14) in 1QS 8:7b-8a; 1QH 6:25d-27a; 7:8-9. See also Tsevat, 72; JPS Tanak and NEB.

dering its usage, **בַּחַן** seems to have a theological significance; the testing aims at “evaluating the dependability”⁷ or quality of the people tested.

The radicals **בַּחַן** may denote “fortress,”⁸ yet the context of Isa 28:14-22 does not allow such understanding in v. 16. The use of **בַּחַן** here seems to denote the quality of the stone, not its size. Therefore, as **בַּחַן** is often used, the meaning “tested stone” seems most appropriate. In fact, **אֶבֶן בַּחַן**, while it literally means “stone of testing,” is an attributive genitive construction in which **אֶבֶן** is characterized qualitatively by **בַּחַן** (which serves as an adjective). It is this quality of the **אֶבֶן** that makes it fit for the intended foundation.

פֶּנֶת יְקָרָה מוֹסֵד מוֹסֵד

The word **פֶּנֶת**, a feminine construct of **פֶּנֶה**, “corner,” has both literal and metaphorical connotations. Architecturally, it refers, for example, to the corner of the altar (Exod 27:2), houses (Job 1:19), city walls (Neh 3:24), or the city itself (2 Chr 28:24). Metaphorically, **פֶּנֶת** can refer to human leaders (Judg 20:2; 1Sam 14:38; Isa 19:13). In Ps 118:22 and Zech 10:4, **פֶּנֶה** seems to foreshadow the Messiah.

The word **יְקָרָה** clearly means “precious” in the sense of value or cost.⁹ Nonetheless, its appearance in a construct

⁷Terry L. Brensinger, “**בַּחַן**,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:636.

⁸See Roberts, 294-99.

⁹For example, in 1 Kgs 7:9 the reference is to a “costly stone”; in

chain has led to some disagreements in translation: due to its difficulty, some prefer taking יקרת as a noun rather than an adjective. However, on analogy with a similar construct (noun) + construct (adjective) + absolute (noun) pattern in Deut 21:11, we should maintain יקרת as an adjective.

Similarly, the second מוסר,¹ a Piel participle of יסר has troubled scholars, some regarding it as a dittography. Yet, Irwin, followed by Roberts, has observed that the repetition of אבן gives support to the repetition of מוסר.²

To maintain the adjectival force of יקרת and the syntactical function of dswm, it seems better to translate as “a precious corner(stone) of a founded foundation.” Thus אבן and its synonyms, אבן בחן and פנת יקרת, designate the unparalleled quality of Yhwh’s salvific “foundation.”

המאמין לא יחיש

The meanings and relationship of המאמין and יחיש have also been debated. If המאמין, *hiphil* participle of אמן, refers to human beings it may mean “the one who believes.”³

Isa 13:12 God promises to make the people more “precious” than gold; and in Isa 43:4 Judah is said to be precious in God’s sight. Metaphorically, יקרה can also denote human leaders (Jer 15:19; Lam 4:2).

¹The participle is indicated by dagesh forte.

²Irwin, 32, calls this repetition as anastrophe and Roberts, 300, uses it for the stichometric division of the verse. There is no justification in the versions for the deletion of dswm. See Blenkinsopp, 392; Watts, 367.

³Watts, 367; Roberts, 300-301; Young, 287.

However, if אבן is considered the subject, it may be translated “the stone that stands firm.”¹ Again, it may imply “the builder”² since the root אבן can also mean “build.” While !ma, in the *niphal* stem, can mean “build” (and rarely so, cf. Cant 7:2), in Isa 28:16 the *hiphil* stem is used and there is no reference to any human builder. Also, אבן should not be considered as the subject of !ymamh, since the two words are too far apart. On the other hand, the *hipil* of !ma, as used elsewhere (e.g. Gen 15:6), has the meaning “believe” in Isaiah (7:9; 43:10; 53:1). Since the context of Isa 7:9 and 28:16 are similar, it is probable that the usage of !ma in both cases denotes ‘believing’ in the promises of God for salvation. In fact, המאמין may mean “whoever believes.”³

The word יחיש⁴ may also mean “haste,”⁵ “waver,”⁶

¹Sawyer, 234. Also, Alexander, 455.

²See Irwin, 30-32. Cf. Clements, 231.

³See Waltke and O'Connor, 622.

⁴For the etymology of vyxy, see Terence E. Fretheim, “חיש,” New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:54-56. While vyx I means “hurry, hasten, speed,” the scarcely attested חיש II means “agitated, anxious, provide for.”

⁵Young, 288; Motyer, 233; Willis, 291; Bultema, 264.

⁶Roberts, 302, appeals to 1QS 8:8 and says that vyxy means “waver, shake, quake.” However, he thinks that vyxy modifies dswm rather than !ymamh, hence his translation, “a foundation which will not shake for the one who trusts.” See also Clements, 231. However, the logical break of the statement, as indicated by the placement of the אָחִיקָה, argues against מוֹסֵד as the subject of יחיש. The grammatical subject of יחיש is clearly המאמין.

“troubled,”¹ or “ashamed.” In the Psalms, where it often appears, חוש denotes ‘hastening’ to help a person.² It is also interesting to note that in Isa 5:19 and 8:1, vwx is used in close parallel to מהר “haste.” Therefore, this use of חוש and the context of Isa 28:14-22 suggest the meaning “haste” in the sense of running for security against the coming storm (cf. 30:16). Nonetheless, the understanding of Isa 28:16 by the LXX and the NT (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6) suggests that other meanings, such as “ashamed,” may not be totally excluded.³

Identity of אבן

The forgoing lexical and syntactical analysis does not only help clarify the translation provided above, it is also instructive for the identity of אבן. Based on the analysis of the text as given above as well as several other arguments that follow, the messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16, out of the many views on the identity of אבן, seems to receive the support of the context, however Isaiah’s immediate audience might have understood the passage.

It may be noted that the language of Isa 28:16 is clearly metaphorical and that the cornerstone imagery is not meant

¹See Grogan, 180; Alexander, 455.

²Thus, the psalmist prays that God should hasten to help him (Ps 22:19; 38:22; 40:13; 70:1,5; 71:12; 119:60; 141:1). The meaning “hasten” or “quick” is also seen in Deut 32:35 and 1 Sam 20:38.

³E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 566, understands the clause “he who believes shall not make haste” as a metonymy of the effect: “hastening away or flight is put as the effect for the confusion and shame which is the cause of it.”

to be taken literally.¹ Gordon H. Matties's comment is straight to the point: "the cornerstone metaphor grows out of architectural usage but refers also to human leaders, and in particular, to the royal one of David's house, whom God raises up in marvelous ways to create stability and justice." The reference to "justice"² for a "line" and "righteousness" for a "plummet" (v. 17) supports this metaphorical understanding of the text.

As stated earlier, the historical circumstance of Isa 28:16 was one of crisis. The coming of the overwhelming scourge which would sweep away the false refuge of the Judean leaders (28:15,18) seemed inevitable (cf. 29:2-3; 30:5; 31:1; 32:12-14; 29:2-3).³ If this impending judgment was inevitable, it follows that Yhwh's activity of placing אבן in Zion (v. 16) was equally a future event. Reading chaps. 28-35 as a unit makes clear that the restoration of Judah after an impending calamity, probably the captivity (29:18-24; 32:12-14),⁴ is in focus. This is indicated by the mention of a "return" to Zion (35:8-10) and the language of restoration (33:5-6, 18-20; 35:1-10). While the general context of chs. 28-35 seems to place Yhwh's activity in the future, the lack of evidence

¹See Young, 287; Roberts, 309.

²Gordon H. Matties and John Walton, "פִּנְיָה," New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:640.

³For this researcher, the "overwhelming scourge" (v. 15) does not refer only to Assyria, it may also point to the Babylonian captivity. Cf. v. 19 which indicates that the storm will come several times.

⁴In fact, Yhwh says he himself will besiege Jerusalem (29:2-3), yet he will later fight against the nations that attack Jerusalem (vv. 7-8; 30:31). Again, the city of David will be desolate (32:12-14), yet in the future Yhwh will restore it (33:18-20; 35:1-10).

for the fulfilment of Isa 28:16 in its historical setting allows for the realization that more was meant by this cornerstone imagery. Further, the reference in Isa 30:19-20; cf. Joel 2:23 to the “teacher” who will be available to those in Zion seems to refer to the Messiah, and thus complements Isa 28:16.

Some think that the messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16 can be sustained only by emending the *piel* perfect יָסַד into *Qal* participle יֹסֵד so as to place this transaction of Yhwh into the future. Yet, as noted earlier, the reading of the MT need be maintained and יָסַד may be explained as a prophetic perfect¹ or a modal perfect, which together with הִנְנִי may point to the future.² The future focus of Yhwh’s activity and the general metaphorical language of Isa 28 are important for understanding Isa 28:16. The lexical-syntactical study indicated that Yhwh will certainly lay the אֶבֶן in Zion in the future, and that this אֶבֶן is tested for its quality and dependability for a sure foundation. The אֶבֶן is also called פֶּנֶת יְקָרָה, a term which is used elsewhere for human leaders. Since, as we shall see, אֶבֶן is used for divine being, and פֶּנֶת יְקָרָה is also used for human leaders, it is reasonable to argue that אֶבֶן in Isa 28:16 combines elements of both divinity and humanity, thus befitting the character of the Messiah. The fact that faith is

¹Young, 286, raises and answers the question, How can the stone be Messiah who came so much later? “The decree of God goes back to eternity; the plan of salvation has been determined, and is to be accomplished in time.” See also Kaiser, 170; Alexander, 454.

²Cf. Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic, based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius (Oxford: Clarendon, [1952]), s.v. “הִנְנִי.”

required in this divine-human אבן indicates that not a mere stone is referred to here.

Would the current historical setting allow for a messianic prophecy in Isa 28? This question has led some scholars away from a messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16. However, it should be noted messianic prophecies sometimes seem to be 'out of context,' in that while the historical audience might be looking for an immediate solution in a particular historical crisis, Yhwh often points them to the ultimate solution, namely, the reality of the salvation and rest grounded on faith in the Messiah. For example, the prophecy concerning Immanuel (however this may be understood; cf. 7:14), the Child to be born (9:6), and the Branch (11:2), all were given during the days of king Ahaz when he was faced with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. Micah, Isaiah's contemporary, also gave the prophecy about the Mesaijah (5:2) in the same historical setting. If all these prophecies were given during the same historical crises, then its messianic interpretation is no exception.

That אבן in Isa 28:16 represents the Messiah is supported by the metaphorical use of the term. In Gen 49:24 God is said to be the "stone of Israel," and in some other places he is called "Rock" (Deut 32:4,15,18,31; Isa 26:4), thus paving the way for the use of "stone" for the Messiah. In Ps 118:22 the "cornerstone" which the builders rejected is universally interpreted as representing 28:16. However, it should be noted messianic prophecies sometimes seem to be 'out of context,' in that while the historical audience might be looking for an immediate solution in a particular historical crisis, Yhwh often points them to the ultimate solution, namely, the reality of the salvation and rest grounded on faith in the Messiah. For example, the prophecy concerning Immanuel (however this may be understood; cf. 7:14), the Child to be born (9:6),

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Likewise, the "stone" that strikes the feet of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is understood to refer to the Messiah and his kingdom (Dan 2:34). Again, the reference to אבן in Zech 3:9 (cf. 4:7) may point to the Messiah.² Isa 28:16 and Zech 3:9 have some similarities. In both texts Yhwh lays the אבן, which, in Zech 3:9; 4:10 has seven eyes. The removal of sin and the bringing of peace and prosperity are associated with this אבן (Zech 3:9-10). The immediate context of Zech 3:8-10 and 4:7-10 as well as analogy with other prophetic writings (Isa 11:1-5; 53:1-12; Jer 23:6; Ezek 36:29-30; 37:24-28; Amos 9:13-14; Mic 4:4) where the removal of sin and the bringing of peace and prosperity is an act of the Messiah, shows that אבן in this text, as in Isa 28:16, is clearly a messianic title.

In Isa 8:14, God is referred to as the "stone of stum-

¹See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 169-172.

²See Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 877-885.

bling” for Israel and Jerusalem. However, while in 8:14 Yhwh seems to be the אֶבֶן, in 28:16 it is Yhwh who lays the אֶבֶן and, according to E. J. Young, since in Isa 9:6 we are told that the Messiah is God, we “are prepared for the statement of the present verse, so replete with Messianic characteristics, namely, that God Himself has laid in Zion a stone.”¹

This would suggest a referent other than ‘God’, hence the Messiah. It has already been pointed out that פִּנֵּה can refer to leaders (Judg 20:2; 1 Sam 14:38; Ps 118:22; Isa 19:13; Zech 10:4).² Particularly instructive are Ps 118:22 and Zech 10:4. The רֹאשׁ פִּנֵּה “head of corner” in Ps 118:22 refers to the Messiah (cf. Mark 12:10) and Zech 10:4 seems to convey the idea of stability and salvation for Judah through a “cornerstone,” probably a royal, as may be gathered from the combination of “cornerstone” and “ruler.” Thus, as in these texts, cornerstone in Isa 28:16 seems to refer to a divine-human being, the Messiah.³

In Isa 28:16, security is promised those who believe. Isaiah also emphasizes the importance of faith in similar crises (7:4,9) and other oracles dealing with the present crisis (30:15; 36:4-15; cf. Hab 2:4). The context of Isa 28:14-22 suggests that faith in this symbolic אֶבֶן leads to salvation, a concept further developed in 33:5-6. The association of ‘righteousness’ and ‘justice’ with אֶבֶן (v. 17) seems to be cha-

¹Young, 285. See also Grogan, 181, who notes that Isa 28:16 is a development of 8:14 and that such “thematic development is a leading feature of Messianism” in Isaiah.

²Although the Targum of Ps 118:22 refers to David as the “stone,” its translation of the MT “capstone” as “king and ruler” indicates that cornerstone refers to a leader, not an actual stone.

³Thus, the Messiah is presented by way of an anthropopatheia.

racteristic of the Messiah, in that these concepts are usually mentioned by Isaiah in connection with the Messiah (9:7; 11:4-5; 16:5; 32:1,16; 42:1-6). It is also interesting to note that as in Isaiah's stone imagery, the NT intimately associates 'righteousness' and 'faith' with the Messiah, Christ: he is the source of righteousness (e.g. Rom 3:22), and faith in him leads to eternal salvation (e.g. Acts 4:10-12; Eph 2:8).

Finally, as already stated above, the messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16 receives support from the LXX, the Targums, other Jewish sources, the NT, and the church fathers. The LXX, by translating ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ "the one who believes on him," seems to have understood the imagery as referring to the Messiah. The same understanding is evident in the Targum Isa 28:16 which replaces "stone" with "king."¹ While other Jewish sources do not specifically refer to the אבן in Isa 28:16 as the Messiah, their general messianic interpretation of OT stone texts is well noted.²

The NT interprets several OT references to אבן as referring to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.³ It explicitly refers to Christ as the "stone" in Isa 28:16 (Rom 9:33; 10:11; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-8). Rom 9:32-33 (cf. 10:11) is a mixed quotation from Isa 8:14 and 28:16, showing that to believers Christ is the cornerstone of their salvation; but to unbelievers, He is a

¹Similarly, Tg Zech 4:7 renders "anointed one" instead of the MT "stone" (cf. Tgs Zech 3:8; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Isa 4:2; Zech 6:12 and Lam Rab 1:51), pointing further to the pre-existence of the Messiah (cf. Tgs 72:17; Mic 5:1; and b Pes 54a; 1 Enoch 48:3).

²See Num Rab 13:14; תולדות הצנא 20; תרומה הצנא 6; עקב הצנא 10; Ag Ber 33a,3-7; and Josephus, Ant 10. 210; b Sanh 38a.

³See Matt 21:24,42; Mark 12:10; 21:42; Luke 20:17-18; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:32-33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:4-8. Other related texts include Matt 16:18; Luke 2:34; John 7:37-38; 1 Cor 3:11,12; 10:4; 1 Tim 1:16.

stumbling stone. Eph 2:20-22 speaks of Christ as the chief cornerstone of the temple of God, namely, believers, and that the apostles are the foundation of this spiritual building. 1 Pet 2:6-8 quotes from Ps 118:22 and Isa 8:14; 28:16, making the same point as in Rom 9:32-33. The messianic interpretation of "stone" in the NT can be classified into three: (a) the keystone and foundation stone of the true temple of God (Mark 12:10; Luke 20:18; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:33; 10:11; Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pet 2:4-6); (b) stone that crushes and the stumbling stone (Matt 21:44; Luke 20:18; Rom 9:32; 1 Pet 2:8); and (c) the living Rock which dispenses water of life (John 7:37-38; 1 Cor 10:4).¹ The church fathers follow the NT in a unanimous messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16.²

¹It is interesting to note that the incident of John 7:37-38 took place on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, during which water was poured into a vessel on the altar of burnt offerings. This event received a messianic interpretation in Judaism; in the messianic age the stream of blessing will be poured over the whole earth (T. Sukka 3.3; cf. Ezek 47:1-2). Thus, "as the first redeemer (Moses) caused the spring to arise (when he divided the rock in Horeb, Exod 17:6), so the last redeemer will cause water to rise up, as it is written: A fountain shall come forth of the house of Yahweh (Joel 3:18)" (Qoh Rab 1:9).

²See *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.2-4; Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 34.2; 36.1; 70.1; 76.1; 86.2-3; 90.5; 100.4; 113.6; 114.2,4; 126.1; *Cyprian Treatises of Cyprian*, *Treatise 12: Testimonies* 2.16-17; Tertullian *Against Marcion* 3.7; 5.5,7; Tertullian *An Answer to the Jews* 10,14; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.21.7; Methodius *Fragments: Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* 6; Acts of Philip: *Of the Journeyings of Philip the Apostle*; Augustin *Letters* 159.5.16; Augustin *On the Gospel of John* 7.23; Augustin *On the Psalms* 74.8; Augustin *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed* 23.43; Gregory of Nyssa *On the Baptism of Christ*; Jerome *Letters* 108.13; Gregory of Nazianzen *On the Great Athanasius: Oration* 21.7; Ambrose *Duties of the Clergy* 1.29.141; Ambrose *Of the Christian Faith* 4.5.53; Aphrahat *Demonstrations I: Of Faith* 1.6-8.

Conclusion

Isa 28:16 is difficult to interpret, especially the referent of אבן. This paper has investigated the identity of אבן through lexical, syntactical, contextual, and intertextual analyses. It appears that while Isa 28:16 points its immediate audience to faith in Yhwh as the only source of security in the impending calamity, the אבן imagery seems to transcend the immediate historical situation and encompass the future, namely the coming of the Messiah in whom eternal salvation by grace through faith is anchored. In this regard, אבן and its synonyms, פנת יקרת and אבן בחן, designate the unparalleled quality of the Messiah as the true foundation of human salvation. Although the messianic interpretation of Isa 28:16 is not new, this study has provided additional information and a detailed analysis of the text in support of this interpretation, while at the same time making the text relevant to its historical audience.