

The Rock of their Salvation  
Read Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13

Moses needed to prepare for his approaching death. He had much to disclose and only minimal time to express it. Thus, Moses took the few remaining weeks left before he was “gathered to his people” in death, and spoke the words to the Israelites that are recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. In this fifth book of Moses, he related the Israelites’ ventures from the time of their Exodus across the Red Sea to their present situation. He revealed their murmuring and complaining habits. He exposed their intermittent rebellion. And Moses, in Deuteronomy 32:15, reminded them of the ever present Rock that had delivered them—the Rock of their salvation.

The Rock first appeared near the commencement of the Wilderness trek, not long after the Red Sea incident. In the wilderness of Syn, the Israelites quarreled with Moses for there “was no water for the people to drink” (Exodus 17:1). Moses’ reply to the murmuring people was “Why do you test the LORD?” (v. 2). Their retort was a complaint that Moses had brought them out of Egypt, to “kill us and our children and livestock with thirst” (v. 3). God’s gracious response was not retribution for a people unmindful of His liberation, but water from the “**rock**” struck by Moses with his staff.

On the same order, at the completion of the wilderness years, when the first generation of Israelites had passed away, the second generation also quarreled with Moses about water (Numbers 20:1-13). Again mimicking the first generation, a protest was grumbled—“Why have you brought the LORD’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here?” (v. 4). This time, however, when Moses “struck the **rock**” with his rod, grievous consequences, as well as flowing water, followed (v. 11). Moses would no longer be permitted to precede his people into the Land God had Promised. Unbelief precipitated God’s reprisal, for He claimed that Moses had “not believed” Him when Moses struck the rock (v. 12). Hence, Moses was proclaiming his last testament in Deuteronomy rather than marching orders.

Additional mention of the rock occurs in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses repeatedly refers to the Lord as “the **rock**.” He insists that Israel “scorned the **rock** of his salvation” in spite of the fact that “the **rock**” is a “God of faithfulness and without injustice” (Deut. 32:15 and 4). Indeed, though the enemy nations may profess to have a rock, their rock, claims Moses, “is not a rock like our **rock**” (v. 31). Yet, during the Wilderness years, Israel not only “forsook God who made him,” but “neglected the **rock** who begot” him, and “forgot the God who gave birth” to him (vv. 15 and 18).

Fifteen centuries later, an apostle named Paul, reviewing Israel’s history as Moses had in Deuteronomy, writes of this Rock. In his re-examination of the past events, Paul reminds the people in the church of Corinth of what occurred to their “fathers” (1 Corinthians 10:1). His purpose for narrating Israel’s history is so that the Corinthians would not repeat the identical sins as those who traveled through the wilderness. He insists that “these things happened as examples for us” (v.6).

As a result of Paul’s desire to provide examples, his recital begins with the Red Sea incident. Here is where the Israelites “were all under the cloud” and “were baptized into Moses” when they “passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). He continues by describing God’s provision of “spiritual food” and a “spiritual drink” from a “spiritual rock” of which they all partook (v. 3-4). On top of that, Paul’s next statement is most

astounding, and causes us to reread the wilderness stories with an entirely new perspective.

Paul's climactic statement reveals that the "spiritual **rock**" of the wilderness years "was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). And, moreover, this "**rock**" had followed the children of Israel through the wilderness. Consequently, when we return to the Old Testament narratives of the rock that twice brought forth water, we approach them with Christ in view. Even when the rock is not referred to in the text, Christ was there because, Paul states, the "**rock**...followed them" (v. 4).

Essentially, Paul is identifying Jesus as the "**rock**" that Moses writes about. Perhaps Paul's clue that Jesus is the rock comes from Deuteronomy 32 which speaks of the Lord as the "**rock**." Thus, the God who is the saving "**rock**" of Deuteronomy 32:15 is Jesus. And, therefore, it was the Lord Jesus who delivered the Israelites and was "the **rock**" of their "salvation."