

God is a Rock

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I remember hearing frequently in my youth, all those years ago, from older Christians about the declining standards, the difficulties of the day, and undoubtedly they were right.

But I wonder sometimes what they think if they could see the state of Britain today. What is the norm today would have been unacceptable a few years ago, and this has been said many times so forgive me for repeating it. We live in a world of rapidly shifting standards and we're even in a situation where Parliament seems to be about to put on the statute books a law which [00:01:02] whatever the politicians expressed intentions could easily be construed as making the preaching of the gospel that there's only one way to God and that through Jesus Christ as illegal. Now I want to encourage us with a truth, a truth that we know, but I believe that the Lord would have me remind us of. As we look at the scriptures we find that God gives many pictures in order to describe himself. He uses the characteristics of simple objects. He uses them to help us to understand some of his qualities. There are many of these pictures of course, and it's one of these that I intend looking at this afternoon. Many times in the scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament, we read that God is a rock, [00:02:06] we read that God is a rock. And what encouragement that is when everything around us is shifting, nothing in the world is certain, but we have a solid base. We have a solid base for everything because God is a rock, solid, unshifting, permanent. Now what I have in mind, what seems to me to be five different ways that God, God in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus in the New, is referred to as a rock. I'm certainly not suggesting that there are no other angles on the subject, but this is what I have before me for now. And I want to begin with by noting a distinction that can be a bit fuzzy in common English usage.

[00:03:03] I want to distinguish between a stone and a rock. In common English, we find a large rock or boulder, and a large rock or boulder is a rock.

In common English, we find a large rock or boulder, a large stone or boulder being called a rock sometimes. It's not that sort of rock that I want to talk about. It's something which is fixed, is solid. Before we talk about a rock, let's just consider a stone. It's not my subject, but it's an interesting study. And we see in the scriptures the Lord Jesus mentioned as a stone several times. And what we have in mind is a smaller object, movable perhaps, a boulder possibly, perhaps a smaller stone. And we note that he is, for example, a stumbling stone [00:04:06] over which men trip up. This refers to the Jews particularly. They expected their Messiah to come as a liberating king, not as a humble servant.

So they stumbled over him. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. We also note that he is the crushing stone that will fall from a great height and destroy man, emphasising the suddenness and surprise of the judgment that awaits those who reject the Lord Jesus. We read, of course, of the Lord as the chief cornerstone, the keystone in the building. He's also a foundation stone, a foundation for our personal and corporate lives. And we read in Daniel that he is the stone cut without hands [00:05:07] that grows to fill the whole world. Of course, this looks to the future when he will return and destroy man's empires and rule himself. Okay, but I want to talk about the Lord Jesus, God and the Lord Jesus as a rock. God and the Lord Jesus as a rock, an immovable object in five different aspects.

Essentially, I'm taking two from the Old Testament and three of the Lord Jesus Christ as a rock from the New. Although, in fact, two of these three refer directly back to the Old Testament. And it's one of these I want to start with. So, one verse in 1 Peter chapter 2. [00:06:21] In fact, I'll read two verses. 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 7.

And to you, therefore, which believe, he is precious. But unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner. And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word being disobedient, were unto also they were appointed. A rock of offence.

[00:07:06] That expression appears also in Romans 9 and is quoted from Isaiah 8. When we read a rock of offence, it always goes with a stone of stumbling. We mentioned that.

All of these references clearly point to Israel's attitude to the Lord. The Lord's own people found him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. Let's focus on a rock of offence. What does the word offence here mean? Well, I understand it refers to something which is a hindrance to others. Now, we automatically think of a hindrance as being something that's negative. It doesn't have to be. [00:08:04] The hindrance, the offence, could be because we are unwilling to accept the truth. And that's the case here. The Jews wouldn't accept the Lord Jesus for who he was. They expected their Messiah to come with power and majesty, set them free from the Romans, and then rule. They didn't expect him to come as a lowly, humble man, the man that they saw in Jesus.

By his ways and his words, the Lord Jesus condemned the Jews, particularly, of course, the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, the elders, the lawyers. He showed them up for what they were really like. He showed them that they had no real love for God, no real care for him, primarily followers of tradition, having a form but no reality.

[00:09:11] And they were offended by him, so much so that they wanted to get rid of him. In fact, they were utterly determined to get rid of him. He was a stumbling stone and a rock of offence, a rock of offence, an immovable object. The Lord was immovable. He couldn't be flattered or bribed or threatened. Nothing would make him modify his declaration of the truth or his condemnation of the religious leaders. And they were offended by the truth. And it's very easy to draw a parallel for today, isn't it? Many people find God's truth and God's absolute standards a problem. We could say they're offended by them. [00:10:02] The truth regarding the person of the Lord Jesus, his divinity, his virgin birth, his bodily resurrection. They're a problem to many people's belief systems.

The truth that adultery or homosexuality is wrong offends many people. The Lord and his truth are a rock of offence to many people. So, to summarise here, we see the Lord Jesus as a consistent,

immovable teacher of the truth, condemning Jewish hypocrisy, and thus becoming a rock of offence to them. Now, to move over to our second example, and this is in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 10. We'll start at verse 1. [00:11:29] 1. Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. [00:12:02] But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Now this passage, of course, refers to the Israelites' escape from Egypt, and it emphasises the Lord's presence with them all. They were all under the cloud, and passed through the sea. As they fled from Egypt, they had the cloud with them. The cloud, they had the cloud with them. The cloud, the cloud that showed the Lord's presence. He was there with them. Then they passed through the Red Sea, and were told that the waters were standing up as a heap on each side. [00:13:02] And Paul is using this experience of the Israelites as a picture for us. He's taking the example of the Israelites here, and drawing a parallel with our era. So let's look at this just in a little bit more detail. Firstly, they were under a cloud, the cloud of the Lord's presence with them. Secondly, they passed through the sea, the Red Sea. Paul seems to be using this as a picture of baptism, a watery grave in which believers are immersed, and from which they're raised. Thirdly, they ate spiritual food, Paul writes. And here he's emphasising the supernatural origin of the manna, and the fact that it's given a spiritual meaning. As the Lord Jesus explains [00:14:03] in John chapter 6, he is the bread of life, and only those who feed on him have life.

And then fourthly, in verse 4, they drank spiritual drink, drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. Now although the Israelites were given natural water, it was supernatural in the way it was given, its supply was supernatural. But it was also supernatural in the way it was given, Moses had to smite the rock. Now a particular point of this passage, I believe, is that all the Israelites were involved in these spiritual blessings. They were all under the cloud, they all passed through the sea, they all ate the manna, they all drank from the rock, [00:15:06] they all participated, and yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered over the desert. They couldn't enter the land. I think one thing that Paul is teaching from this is that it's possible to be part of the Christian company, to feel the Lord's presence even, to be baptised, to enjoy the privileges of Christian fellowship, breaking of bread, and yet not be saved. Very, very sad that is. Anyway, we read that the rock was Christ. Moses had to strike the rock before there could be that wonderful flow of water, water that satisfied the thirst of everyone who drank. Of course, this tells us of the one who was smitten for us. [00:16:01] In those familiar verses in Isaiah 53, we read that he was smitten of God and afflicted. The Lord Jesus, as the smitten rock, pictures his sufferings, particularly those suffered on our behalf at God's hand. And that wonderful flow of refreshing water came from the rock. We can easily imagine how relieved the thirsty and hot Israelites were to be able to drink cool, refreshing water, the water that flowed from the rock. And the Lord Jesus tells us of rivers of living water.

And he tells his audience, this is in John 7, that he spoke concerning the Spirit, the giving of the Holy Spirit, consequent on his death and resurrection and ascension. [00:17:03] Okay, I now want to turn over to our third speaker, and this is Matthew chapter 16, Matthew 16.

Matthew 16, we'll start at verse 13. When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, some say that they are John the Baptist, some Elias, [00:18:02] and others, Jeremiah, saw one of the prophets. He

saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said unto him, blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The Lord Jesus has taken his disciples away from the hustle and bustle of Galilee. From the hustle and bustle of Galilee, he's taken them far away from the religious hypocrisy of Jerusalem and Judea, and they've gone to Caesarea Philippi. [00:19:03] Caesarea Philippi was at the very northern extremity of Israel. In fact, it was even a shade northeast of Dan, which was the town that throughout the kingdom in the Old Testament was always regarded as Israel's most northerly extreme. At Caesarea Philippi, an area of peace and solitude, he talks to his disciples about serious issues, and this one is vital. This one's fundamental. Who is he? Who is he? So he probes his disciples. He wants them to express their understanding of who he is. But he asks them first, what others say about him. Well, who did others say he was? Well, there was John the Baptist. Many had gone out to see John the Baptist in the wilderness [00:20:04] with his strange garb and his prophetic message, and many had taken note of what he said, accepted the need for repentance, and had been baptized by him. But John had given Herod some home truths, and Herod had taken John and executed him. Now, in fact, Jesus was teaching and baptizing before John had been executed, but it would seem that many people were unaware of this, and it had become quite a common belief among the people that John had been raised from the dead, that Jesus was John the Baptist. Even Herod thought that Jesus might be John raised back to life. I always find that very strange. Herod could believe that an amazing miracle had taken place, [00:21:07] he could believe that a man came back from the dead, a man that he himself had killed, in fact. Yet there was no change of heart on his part, no serious attempt to come to the one who he thought had been raised, who'd received such power. Herod made no serious attempt to hear his message, and he certainly didn't believe in him. So, who do the people say the Lord Jesus was? Some said John the Baptist, some said Elijah, the great prophet from 800 years before, who according to Malachi's prophecy would be sent before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. They must have known that the day of the Lord was a day of judgment. [00:22:03] And perhaps those who thought that the Lord Jesus was Elijah recognized that judgment was deserved and on its way.

But if only they'd accepted Jesus for who he was, they would have seen that the Lord in his mercy, rather than bringing the judgment of the day of the Lord, was giving them his son, his Messiah. Some said the Lord Jesus was Jeremiah. Jeremiah, a man who prophesied to them of their doom in the twilight years of their kingdom. And some said that he was, in general, one of the prophets. In each case, whether it be John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, people in their masses were willing to believe the incredible.

[00:23:06] That someone who died, or in Elijah's case, who'd been taken to heaven alive, had come back to live here on this earth. One thing not suggested by the disciples was that the people thought of him as just an ordinary man. That was not a credible option. There was something amazingly special about this teacher called Jesus, and the masses could only come to grips with it by saying that he was a great and godly person who came back to life. Someone from the past who was raised from the dead.

The Lord Jesus on one occasion said, particularly in reference to the Jews, that should one come back from the dead, they will not believe. And this surely confirms what he says. Many people, it would seem, thought that Jesus was someone who'd come back from the dead. [00:24:06] And they were amazed by him, but in general they did not believe him.

Then the Lord asked the disciples, but who do you say that I am? And as usual, Peter's in there first. He had understood who Jesus was, revealed to him by the Father. He'd understood that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, means the same. The special one who God had promised to send, the one foretold through the Old Testament. Peter understood that Jesus was this one. He also understood something more. He understood that he was the Son of the Living God. And here we're on to something different, perhaps we could say greater. [00:25:02] He understood that Jesus was divine. That's what's contained in this expression. I'm sure you remember that when Caiaphas asked the Lord Jesus whether he was the Son of God, and the Lord agreed that he was, this was the point at which they accused him of blasphemy. They recognised the expression, the Son of God, to have implications of deity. And Peter understood this, revealed to him by the Father. And then the Lord goes on with a play on words. You are Peter, or you are stone. That's what Peter means, stone. And on this rock, not a stone, but a massive rock, I will build my church. The rock is Peter's statement of faith in the Lord Jesus, and the one about whom he's talking, the Lord Jesus himself. The church is built on the truth of the Lord Jesus.

[00:26:09] Of Jesus Christ. And it's wonderful that the Lord should emphasise this. It's not a society for those with similar interests. It has a solid foundation which is fundamental for all who'd be part of this building. But let's just emphasise these fundamental foundation truths on which the church is built. Peter described Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God. And the Lord refers to these as the rock, the foundation truths on which the church is built. The Christ, the Anointed One, that's what Christ means. We've mentioned that already. Let's explore that a bit further though. As we look through the Old Testament, we find three different classes of people that God [00:27:04] instructed should be anointed. And Christ is the perfect example of each class, the fulfilment, the culmination. Firstly, we see that God instructed that priests be anointed.

In Leviticus chapter 6, we read of God's instructions for the anointing of Aaron, the first high priest. And then the anointing of subsequent high priests is mentioned too. The Book of Hebrews, of course, reminds us of the limitations of these priests. They had, for example, to offer sacrifices for their own sins, because they were sinful, as well as the sins of the people. But Christ is the great high priest and offered himself to God as the perfect and complete [00:28:03] sacrifice. And he can now act for us as our high priest.

Anyway, the point is the priests were anointed, and Christ, the Anointed One, is the great high priest, our great high priest. That's priests. Secondly, in 1 Samuel 16, we learn of Samuel's anointing of David.

He anointed David on God's instructions. Christ, the Anointed One, David's greater son, is king of the Jews, and one day will return to rule over this earth and all be subject to him. So we've seen Aaron, the high priest, anointed on God's instructions. We've seen the great King David anointed on God's instructions. [00:29:01] We've seen the great King David anointed on God's instructions. And thirdly, God instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as prophet in his stead.

So we have a prophet anointed on God's instructions. And in Deuteronomy 18, Moses mentioned that God would raise up a prophet from among them. And Christ, the Anointed One, is this prophet, the one who spoke God's words to the people, to perfection.

So we see that when we read of anointing, we're brought into the realm of prophet, priest, and king. And then when Christ is mentioned, we have the perfect, the complete prophet, priest, and king. And

note that in order for him to take these roles, he had to be a man, a real human being.

[00:30:11] Peter said the Lord Jesus was the Christ. He also said he was the Son of the Living God. Well, we mentioned that the Son of God spoke of his deity. He was God as well as man. And that's the rock of Christianity. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the man who is prophet, priest, and king. And he's the Son of the Living God. He's divine. And while we're on this section, we should mention this passage, Matthew chapter 7. Matthew 7, verse 24, the Lord speaking, [00:31:07] Therefore whoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house. And it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house. And it fell, and great was the fall of it. Doing what the Lord says is like building on a rock. We know it, of course, but let's remind ourselves if we don't want to make a mess of our lives or our assemblies, the foundation has to be absolutely right. The Lord and his words.

[00:32:06] And his words. So we see from these New Testament passages three aspects of the Lord Jesus as a rock. A rock of offence, particularly to the Jews, but the principle extends to any who are offended by the solid, unyielding truth of Christ. The smitten rock, to provide life, refreshment, and the Holy Spirit. And the foundation rock for our personal and corporate lives.

So let's move on to the Old Testament teaching.

There are two different Hebrew words that are translated rock in the Old Testament, and they have a different emphasis. As we read through the Psalms, particularly, we often find God mentioned as being a rock. And both words are used. [00:33:04] We'll look at the first one. Let's go to Psalm 18.

One of these words that's translated rock in English refers to a high place, an elevated place, perhaps a cliff. And as I understand it, the emphasis of this word is on its elevation, its height. And several times this word is used to describe a high place. And as I understand it, the emphasis of this word is on its elevation, its height. And several times this word is used to describe the Lord, particularly in the Psalms. And in many of these times when it is used, another word is used at the same time. A word that helps to give us the emphasis of the word.

[00:34:04] And that's the word fortress. In Psalm 18, verse 2, we read, The Lord is my rock and my fortress.

In this Psalm, and in 2 Samuel 22, David is using these words as a celebration of the Lord delivering him from the hands of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. Now, when we think of this rock, this sort of rock, what do we see? We have an elevated place, a high place, where a soldier can look out over the countryside, see for miles. He can view any enemy that's approaching.

He's in a superb position to defend himself. It's terribly difficult from the bottom of a cliff [00:35:03] to attack an enemy who's on the top. The position is defensible. God is our rock. God is our cliff, we could say. God is our fortress. God is our cliff, we could say. God is our fortress. David knew this from his many experiences, perhaps particularly fighting the Philistines, but other enemies too. David knew practically the Lord giving a strong defense from the attacks of his enemies. He was able to defeat his enemies because of the ground on which he stood. Now, there's an obvious application to

this, isn't there? We too have an enemy. We're not fighting against flesh and blood. Our warfare is spiritual. But we too have the Lord as our rock. And I see this as giving us a picture of the Lord as the strong, solid ground [00:36:06] from which we're able to defend ourselves against Satan's attacks. The enemy can and does attack us in many ways. And as we mentioned at the start, nothing is solid and fixed as far as this world's concerned. But we have the solid rock of the true God and his divine standards.

And as the Lord Jesus used the scriptures to respond to Satan's temptations and Satan's testings, so we too have his unchangeable word with which to respond to the devil.

The second Hebrew word that's translated rock has a different emphasis. [00:37:01] The word has the idea of sharpness within it. And it really refers to a sort of craggy area, an area where someone can hide, an area of shelter, area of security.

David was particularly aware of the protection afforded by a rocky area. He spent time, for example, in the wilderness of Ziph and the surrounding area, which were in the highlands of Judah. It's the sort of area we seem to be talking about here. A rocky area where it's easy to find somewhere to hide. In 1 Samuel 21 and 22, David is on the run. He's on the run from Saul. And there's that terrible incident where Saul, using a particularly unpleasant man called Doeg, an Edomite, [00:38:04] murders the priests and their families just because Ahimelech, the priest, supplies provisions and Goliath's sword to David, believing David to be on the king's business. And in the next chapter, David is on the run from Saul. But hearing that a town called Keilah was under attack from the Philistines, David puts himself at risk by going to Keilah and rescuing the town. And rescuing the town. And the Lord tells him that the people of Keilah would repay him, but repay him by handing him over to Saul. So he leaves Keilah and goes to the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul, with a large company of men, he had 3,000, chases David and his 600 followers.

And it says that Saul sought him every day but didn't find him.

[00:39:04] David and his men could hide among the rocks and they were secure. Saul and his 3,000 couldn't find David and his 600.

And later on, in chapter 26, we find Saul again following David into the wilderness of Ziph.

And again, David and his men remain hidden.

A rocky area. Providing shelter and security. The Lord's a rock. He is security.

[00:40:03] We didn't read a reference for this, wonderfully.

In Psalm 18, verse 31, we have a reference to this. Who is God, save the Lord. Who is a rock, save our God.

That's one of the many examples of the use of this word. Shelter and security. The Lord provides protection. Storms, problems, difficulties around. Not just in our relationship with the world, but tragically in our relationship with other believers sometimes. [00:41:01] The Lord can protect physically, emotionally, and mentally if we hide in him.

But the scriptures go a bit further. God is a rock. And this sort of rock, a rocky area, is used. But the scriptures take it a bit further in showing aspects in which God is this sort of rock. This is what I mean. If you turn over to Psalm 89. Psalm 89.

Verse twenty-six says, He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God. And the Rock is...

God. Are we all in him? Are we all in him? Our sinking God and our trickster God, [00:42:02] my God and the Rock of my salvation.

Rock of salvation. A completely solid and unshakable basis for salvation.

Whatever aspect of salvation we think of, God is the Rock of salvation.

And of course, salvation in scripture doesn't just... doesn't just refer to being saved from sins and their penalty. But perhaps we think primarily of this aspect.

And as we know, there are some who would teach that we can be saved today and lost tomorrow. The salvation they teach is not based on a rock. With God's salvation, we have absolute certainty. He is the Rock of my salvation. Turn over to Psalm 62.

[00:43:12] Psalm 62, verse seven says, In God is my salvation and my glory.

The Rock of my strength and my refuge is God. The Rock of my strength. We're very weak. And the enemy is strong. But God is strength we can rely on. Unshakable, unmovable, solid strength.

Unshakable, unmovable, solid strength. Unshakable, unmovable, solid strength.

To live for Christ and face the dangers of the world. Rock of strength. Rock of my strength. And in Psalm 94, verse 22, [00:44:15] It says, Psalm 94, verse 22 says, But the Lord is my defence and my God is the Rock of my refuge.

The Rock of refuge. The Rock of my refuge. A secure refuge from the storms of life. The Rock of my refuge. Now, there are a couple more of these which actually don't come out in the King James Version. But I'll read them to you from another translation. Psalm 71, verse three says, Be to me a rock of habitation whereunto I may continually resort. Be to me a rock of habitation. [00:45:01] Where we should live. In God and in the conscious knowledge of him as secure and moving, dependable. A rock of habitation, living in him. And finally, Psalm 73, verse 26.

Be to me a rock of habitation. A rock of habitation. Psalm 73, verse 26.

Again, I take it from another translation. It should read something like, My flesh and my heart fade. God is the Rock of my heart and my portion forever.

The Rock of my heart. I think this implies something on a different level from the others we've mentioned. It implies that our affections are involved. We love him because he first loved us. [00:46:02] The Rock of my heart. The one who loves us with an unshakable love and who we love poorly, but we do love in response.

So, just to summarise as time's gone on. We see in scripture, the Lord Jesus in the New Testament and God in the Old Testament presented as a rock. And I would note that in the New Testament, we see the Lord Jesus as a rock of offence. Very sad, this. But an offence to those who reject the solid and absolute truth of the Lord Jesus. And in this world of shifting standards, there are many who are offended by him, to whom he is a rock of offence. Secondly, he's the smitten rock. [00:47:01] Smitten for us to provide life, a new relationship, a Holy Spirit for us. Thirdly, he's the foundation rock for our personal lives, our lives together. And then fourthly and fifthly, when we're under attack from the enemy and when we're affected by the storms of life, we see God as a rock in two different ways. A high rock, where we have an impregnable position and a rocky area where we can hide. And in this last aspect, we noted five ways that he is seen as a rock. A rock of salvation, a completely solid and unshakable basis for salvation, a rock of strength, a solid rock in our weakness, solid strength in our weakness, a rock of refuge, a shield of protection, [00:48:03] a rock of peace, a rock of love, a rock of refuge, a secure refuge from the storm of life, a rock of habitation, living in him, a solid basis for living, and the rock of my heart. His love is unshakable, but how much do we love him in return? OK, I'd like to close with 242. 242. Sing aloud to God our strength.

He has brought us hitherto. He will bring us home at length. This the Lord our God will do. Doubt not, for his word is stable. Fear not, for his arm is able. 242.