

Sermon – 03/09/2006 pm

Song of Moses – God the Rock

Study Text: Deuteronomy 32:1-14

Some years ago I was taken on a short sight seeing tour around Bristol. Out on a country road we stopped to see a large rock on the side of the road. On the face of the rock was a crack large enough for a person to hide in. Over 250 years ago a Mr Toplady did just that, during a fierce storm. He later wrote the famous hymn 'Rock of Ages cleft for me'. He likened that rock to the shelter the believer finds in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Toplady was not the first person to picture the Lord as a rock. Moses called God 'the Rock' in this famous song which he wrote. He had taken Joshua into the tent of meeting and there the Lord spoke to him. He gave Moses the words of this song, and told the people to teach it to each succeeding generation. This song would stand as a witness against the children of Israel when they broke the covenant. They had the Book of the Law, but a song was easier to learn and remember.

Scholars tell us that songs were often part of contemporary secular treaties. When a king conquered a city or country the people became his vassals and they had to abide by the terms of treaty he made with them. Not only was this treaty recorded in the presence of witnesses, and carefully preserved, but a song was given to the people to be a constant reminder of their status before the king.

This song of Moses was actually a legal document or law suit, indicting the people when they broke the covenant the Lord God made with them. It begins with a call for witnesses; then the character or nature of God is declared along with his mighty works. Accusations are then brought forth and divine judgment announced.

God's Character

Heaven and earth, the whole creation was called upon to witness the words of God as he set out this divine indictment. What God was about to say through Moses was for people from all nations to hear, although there was a focus upon the people of Israel with whom he made this covenant. We find the same call for cosmic witness from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:2) and Micah (Micah 6:1-2).

Heaven and earth were to witness that God spoke the truth. He was teaching the people how to live – that is why he gave the commands. God was not seeking make life difficult or dull for his people, but full of joy and gladness. His teaching was not harsh or threatening but gentle, like showers of rain, or the morning dew.

The Israelites saw little rain during the wilderness years, but they did see dew. It was in the morning dew that they were sustained all those years for in this dew they found the manna, the bread from heaven. More recently they had come to enjoy showers of rain. It was a pleasant sight, sound and smell, especially to rural people. So is the teaching of the Lord and his commands. His word is pleasing to our ears – or should be. His commands are not a

burden, but a delight to the heart of those who love the Lord their God with all their heart, all their soul, and all their mind.

God's teaching is not just commands but includes a self-revelation by God. God reveals to us his own character. His commands are not just 'do this or else' but 'do this because I am holy', 'do this because I love you and want you to be holy also'. God does not leave us to imagine what he is like. He tells us what he is like.

God's power is revealed in the creation but his holiness, justice and righteousness are revealed in his word. In this song we are told God is *a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright* (32:4). In this covenant document God declares that he is just and upright in character and that all his works are perfect.

God is *the Rock*. This epithet is used seven times in this song. What do you think of when you think of a rock? Unless you have been hit on the head by a falling rock, you probably think of something firm and solid – something immovable. Rocks make up much of our coastline. They stand firm against the incessant pounding of the waves. If you were to build your house by the sea you would build on the rocks – not on the sand.

Such is the image of God portrayed in this passage. God is the Rock. He is steadfast and unchanging. In fact Paul refers to Jesus as the spiritual rock that accompanied them through the wilderness. They drank life-giving water from the rock, and that rock was Christ (I Corinthians 10:4).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). What comforting words these were for the New Testament Christians as they faced opposition and persecution on every side. The authorities had arrested some and put them in prison. They were also confronted by false teachers. What about today? Do you find comfort in these words about Jesus? We live in a fast changing world and are assailed by wickedness constantly. Some are getting blown this way and that by different doctrines. Remember Jesus Christ is unchanging. You can stand firm in him.

'The wise man built his house upon the rock' said Jesus as he concluded his sermon on the mount. He was referring to those who heard his words and did them. The person whose life is established upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his teaching will not fall in the day of trouble and distress. God is the Rock. Jesus is the rock of salvation. Are you standing on this rock? Do you ascribe greatness to your God the Rock, whose work is perfect and whose ways are just?

God is also pictured as the Father of his people whom he delivered out of bondage (32:6). God is not just the Creator, he is not just the Rock, but he actively keeps his people. It is as if he is a living rock that reaches out and holds us. God regarded these people as his children for in a sense he gave them birth. He rescued them from slavery and death. He bought them and established them. He expected these people to acknowledge this, and to walk in obedience to him as their Father.

But *they have corrupted themselves* this song says (32: 5). This song speaks prophetically. They acted foolishly as if they were not his children. They stepped outside the bounds of the covenant he made with them by going after other gods. The consequences of such perverse foolishness are outlined as the song proceeds.

God's Goodness

God not only declared his name and character by words; He declared it by works in this world, especially his works among his own chosen people. If they cared to remember or ask their fathers and elders they would have known all the mighty works the Lord did in bringing them into their own land. *Remember the days of old...ask you father and he will tell you (32:7).*

The song goes right back to the beginning when the sons of Adam were separated and given their own lands (note the name 'Most High' (*el elyon*) which takes us back to Abraham in Genesis 14). This probably refers to the time after the flood when the sons of Noah went of to live in their own lands as nations with their own languages. God actually set boundaries for these nations. God is the God of all the nations. Though it may seem that Satan rules in some, such as communist and Islamic nations, ultimately God is the one who determines who rules the nations and the boundaries of that nation.

Preaching to pagans in Athens, Paul spoke of the totality of God's rule and authority. God not only made the world and everything in it, he not only gives life to all people, he made all the nations with preappointed times and boundaries of their dwelling (Acts 17:26). God is omnipotent. He is sovereign over all creation, over all nations and all history. We will have cause to remember this as we dispute the history of our own nation and slowly slip under the rule of Satan.

While God is sovereign over all nations, his special focus was upon the children of Jacob or Israel (32: 9). They were the *apple of his eye*; they were in the very centre of his great plan of salvation for sinners. It was through these people that God the Son would, in the fullness of time, come down to live on this earth as Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Here in this song of Moses it is the past goodness of God towards his people that is outlined. He found them in the desert and came to their aid. God is pictured as an eagle hovering over them and carrying them on his wings. He alone led them during those forty years. He alone provided for them and protected them. As they came to the Jordan they had a foretaste of the rich foods they would enjoy in Canaan – milk and honey, wheat and wine.

The Almighty God, the Most High who created all things set his love upon the people. He saved them from misery and death, he led them when they were lost, and sustained them when they fainted. He carried them on his wings to the place of their inheritance. God the Rock of their salvation kept his children and would continue to keep them according to the terms of his covenant. But would these blessed people remain faithful to God the Father?

Will you remain faithful to God your Father? You were bought with a price, the precious blood of his only Son. Will you hold fast to the Lord as he carries you on his wings to your eternal inheritance?

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon