

Dear brothers and sisters, when studying the ways in which the Almighty refers to Himself, we remember that although there is only One Name which He selected for himself, that is Yahweh, there are many titles that he has given Himself, appropriate to the situations he is dealing with. For example Isaiah refers to Him as KODESH YISRAEL, the Holy One of Israel, while Moses refers to him as Adonai Echad the LORD is ONE, as well as יְהוָה רֹפֵאךָ 'Yahweh Rophekha' 'I will be your healer'. Today's study is that of Tsur, the ROCK.

In the Old Testament the word 'Tsur' is found 78 times, not all of them referring to the Almighty, but sometimes referring to ordinary rocks. The first time it appears in the Scriptures is in the book of Exodus when the children of Israel, were speaking against Moses because there was no water to drink. Moses appealed to Yahweh who instructed Moses to "Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and your rod, wherewith you smote the river (of Egypt), take in your hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted YAHWEH, saying, Is the YAHWEH among us, or not? (Exo 17:5-7)

The second time the word Tzur appears is in Exodus 33 "And the LORD said, Look, *there is* a place by me, and you shall stand upon a **rock**: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and you shalt see my afterglow: but my face shall not be seen. (Exo 33:21-23)

Now the apostle Paul refers to these events in his letter to the Corinthians

"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 baptized 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**" (1Co 10:1-4)

Similarly as Moses was hidden in the rock, so also are those who believe in Christ Jesus, as far as the old man was concerned they are dead and their life is hid with Christ in God and when Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory

The rising generation of Israelites were again tested towards the end of the wilderness journey . It was a tragic repetition of the congregation grumbling for water. The new generation complained just as their rebellious fathers did forty years previously. This dreadful lack of faith after the blessings they had experienced, brought Moses and Aaron to prostrate themselves at the door of the tabernacle. Again the glory of the Lord appeared and Moses was commanded, “Take the rod ... and *speak* to the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water” (Num. 20:8). Previously as we have seen Moses had been told to *strike* the rock. But Moses was so angry with the people that rather than speaking to the rock, he struck it twice, and worse, spoke heatedly to the rebels, saying “must **we** fetch you water out of this rock?” God did provide water out of the rock but stated sadly to Moses and Aaron, “Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall *not* bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (v. 12).

Later in Deuteronomy Moses wrote of that Rock, He *is* the Rock (tzur), his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he. (Deut. 32:4) and goes on to say of Jeshurun (the upright one, expressing an ideal view of Israel’s character) “But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked . . . then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock (tzur) of his salvation . . . Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee” (Deut. 32:15–18).

David is mindful of the rocklike character of Yahweh in the 61st Psalm when he says: “Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle forever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings” (61:1–4).

This also reminds us of the parable that Jesus addressed to the Galilean Jews recorded in Matthews Gospel, “Therefore whosoever 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 every one 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 that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass,

when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.
(Mat 7:24-1)

It is up to us to build our faith and our lives upon that Rock. To do this we need to read our Bibles daily. We must “mind”, or fill our minds with “*godly* things not *earthly* things” and we must remember that we should be “living for the future”, *not* for this present life, and that we should be striving to manifest the Father” to those about us. But we cannot manifest God if we are ignorant of His character! It is only from His Word that we can learn of Him. Paul told us to be followers of him as he was of Christ. Christ manifested His Father. It is up to us to try to live lives that show forth a godly character. As again Paul wrote to Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Ti 2:15)

Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

It is by God’s grace in that we are able to read our Bibles and enabled to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—so what is our response? “If then you are risen with Christ, seek those things that are above ... Set your affection on things above ... For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (not in the cleft of a rock in Horeb, but in the ultimate Rock of our salvation). When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1–4). But this is conditional on our response in these days of our probation: “Mortify (put to death) therefore your members which are upon earth; fornication, uncleanness, covetousness ... also *put off* all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing ye have *put off* the old man ... and have *put on* the new man” (verses 5–10).

A character change is required of the disciple of Christ; we are no longer our own, for we have been bought with a price—the Blood of Christ. However, if we do succeed in putting off these works of the flesh to a greater or lesser extent, we must not leave a void in our way of life. So Paul continues, “*Put on* therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of *mercies*, *kindness*, humbleness of mind, meekness, *longsuffering*: forbearing one another, *forgiving* one another” (verses 12–13). This is the character revealed in Exodus 33, and manifested by Jesus, which must now be cultivated in us, so that in measure the goodness of God will be seen—though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, and never rise to the high standard of our Lord.

Rocks are a symbol of permanence, especially if they of hard material like flint. Generations of people come into the world and then depart from it, but great rocks continue for centuries with little erosion, they are a symbol of stability. David saw that same stability in Yahweh the Elohim of Israel. We see this in the Psalms where more than twenty times the Almighty is referred to as a rock.

As already we have seen the wisdom of the teaching of Jesus showing that if, we have built our house upon a rock, and it will survive the storms of life. Psalm 18:2 confidently says, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust." But in verse 46 he writes Yahweh lives; and blessed *be* my rock(tzur); and let the God of my salvation be exalted (Psa 18:46 KJV) Psalm 19:14 is interesting because the word Tzur has been translated as "strength" "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, **my strength**, and my redeemer" but the word in Hebrew is TZur = **my rock**. (Psa 19:14 KJV) Verse 46 goes on to say "Blessed be my rock (tzur). . . it is God that avenges me and . . . delivers me from my enemies." Psalm 27:5 is very comforting: "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock (tzur)." Psalm 28:1: "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock." (tzur). In Psalm 31:2: "Be thou my strong rock (tzur). . . for thou art my fortress." Psalm 40:2 reads, "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock . . . and he hath put a new song in my mouth." In Psalm 61:2 David says: "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock (tzur) that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." Psalm 62 is very rich: verse 2 (repeated verse 6) "He only is my rock (tzur) and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved." Verse 7 continues, "In God is . . . the rock (tzur) of my strength, and my refuge is in God." Psalm 71:3: "For thou art my rock and my fortress." In Psalm 78:35 we read of Israel, "They remembered that God was their rock (tzur), and the high God their redeemer." Psalm 144 is interesting because the Hebrew word 'tzur' is not immediately apparent in the KJV. A Psalm of David. "Blessed *be* the LORD my strength, (Tzur=rock) who teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and *he* in whom I trust; who subdues my people under me. (Psalm 144:1-2)

These are typical of many others, and this figure of the rock is a very reassuring one. The prophet Isaiah uses the term Tzur in respect of the promised Messiah. In chapter eight verses 14 and 15 reads, "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock (tzur) of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. (Isa 8:14-15) Also we find in Isa 26:3-5 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusts in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH Yah – Yahweh *is* everlasting strength (Tzur): For He brings down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he lays it low; he lays it low, *even* to the ground; he brings it *even* to the dust. The apostle Peter refers this passage to the Lord Jesus, “Unto 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: whereunto also they were appointed. (1Pe 2:7-8) Clearly he applies the rock to the Lord Jesus because he is God-manifest in all his characteristics. Further the Spirit of God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah of the future manifestation of **CHRIST** to Israel, in the day of his power and glory (which is the power and glory of God), styles Him, “**THE MIGHTY ONE OF ISRAEL,**” or, according to the Revised Version, “**THE ROCK,**” saying, “Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One (the Rock) of Israel” (Isa. 30:29).

In conclusion we have Isaiah testimony received from Yahweh, “Thus says the Yahweh the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Yahweh ‘tsvaoth of armies’; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and **beside me there is no God**. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it*? You are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yes, there is no God; I know not any. (Isa 44:6-8)

As a point of interest both Jews and Christians have hymns beginning with the phrase, ‘Rock of Ages.’ But in its Hebrew original, taken from Isaiah 26:3&4 You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH *is* everlasting strength (*Tzur Olamim*), as one of the names of God Himself, it was Jewish long before it was Christian. Truly God is the Rock of Ages as Isaiah wrote, and truly the Rock smitten by Moses was not typical of God but of Christ, “that Rock was Christ.”

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