

Show their rock is not like our rock:

The apologetics of Deuteronomy 32

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“Their rock is not like our rock”

Deuteronomy 32:31a¹

Deuteronomy 32:31² is in Moses swan song to Israel. Israel is to sing this song as a witness from the Lord against them (31:19) that the Lord is the perfect and faithful rock (32:4), whilst Israel is corrupt (32:4, 5) and unfaithful (32:20)—they have rejected the rock³ their Savior (32:15) and deserted him for idols, literally vapors (32:15–21). Their defeat is because Israel’s rock has sold them (32:30). Now coming to our verse, “For their rock is not like our rock” (32:31a).⁴ Life (and death!) will certainly show that the non-Christian’s “rock [idol] is not like our rock.” Only our rock does give salvation, life, meaning and purpose. In fact, this song, as well as being a warning against apostasy and a plea to backsliders, is the life-giving rainfall (32:2, 46, 47) of an evangelistic appeal.⁵ An appeal to those in the deadly clutch of the Siamese twins of idolatry and immorality (cf. Rom.1:18–32). Striking is the Lord’s question and testifying against them when the Lord judges with disasters and difficulties (31:21; 32:23–25):

*³⁶ The LORD will judge his people
and have compassion on his servants
when he sees their strength is gone
and no-one is left, slave or free.
³⁷ He will say: “Now where are their gods,
the rock they took refuge in,*

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² Compare 1 Sam. 2:2; Ps. 18:2, 30–31, 46; Isa. 17:10; 44:8; and Matt. 7:24–27. In Scripture rock means the Lord is our: foundation (and father), faithful one, faultless one, Savior, stronghold and strength.

³ The rock image could be a rugged rock to stand on, or a rock face with an accessible cleft or cave to safely stand on and go in, see the Bible texts in the previous footnote.

⁴ The NIV continues “as even our enemies concede”. This is literally “And our enemies judges”. This can be taken as NKJV, “And our enemies themselves [being] judges (which the NIV somewhat paraphrases), or as Currid does, “And our enemies [are not our] judges (John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006, 5–7), which is how the Septuagint paraphrases it “our enemies are fools.” The parallelism with the first line of verse 32 “not”, plus the link with verse 32 beginning with “For” (NIV omits), seems to point to Currid’s translation. So the meaning is the Sodom like nations are not the judge of Israel, instead the LORD is, as he gives Israel into the nations hands.

⁵ For Israel was a mix of unbelievers and believers compare Rom. 9:6–8 and Heb. 3:16 with 4:2.

³⁸ *the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine of their drink offerings?
Let them rise up to help you!
Let them give you shelter!*

³⁹ *“See now that I myself am He!
There is no God besides me.
I put to death and I bring to life,
I have wounded and I will heal,
and no-one can deliver out of my hand.*

Likewise it is good today to ask those who are “lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... [and] lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:1a and 4b), what will these gods do for you in times of trouble, guilt and death? This is a two-fold strategy—wound to heal (32:39) as you show their rock (presupposition) is not like our rock. The Lord alone is the foundation of life and refuge from the storms of judgement.⁶ Stating this another way, following Francis Schaeffer,⁷ we lovingly push non-Christians to the logical conclusion of their presuppositions, taking their roof off, so they feel their despair and lostness (their grapes are filled with deadly poison and bitterness, 32:32). This is with the aim, that by God’s grace, they turn to the Lord for salvation.⁸ Of course, if the unbeliever is aware of their real need then we go straight to the positive answer—Christ is the only Savior and foundation for life (see Acts 16:29–31).

So let us *show that their rock is not like our rock* with the people we speak to.

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⁶ Also it is fascinating to see the twofold “show their rock is not like our rock” strategy recur in the Old Testament. For instance refer to the twofold appeals, often contrasting the unique Lord to idols, and saying that the Lord is the only Savior: Deut. 30:19; Isa. 43:10–13; 44:6–22; 45:17–25; 55:1, 2; Jer. 2:11–13, 26–28; 10:1–16; and I once heard John Whitcomb say that “Psalm 115 is a presuppositional apologetic about idolatry” (read it to see why).

⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview, Volume One, A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, Second edition 1985, 138–142).

⁸ Does the fact that Israel was to sing these truths, put in poetry and set to music, tell us to also sing songs that show their rock is not like our rock? So a way of doing apologetics is by singing such songs! Some hymns in this vein, whose memorable words and music can drive this healing sword into our heart, are: Graham Kendrick’s *All I once held dear*, Michael Saward’s *King of the universe, Lord of the ages* to the tune in *Praise! Psalms Hymns and Songs for Christian Worship: Music Edition* (Darlington: Praise Trust, 2000), <http://www.praise.org.uk>, number 249; and on the rock theme, Richard Simpkin’s *We praise the God in whom we trust* (this is based on Deuteronomy 32 and is number 707 in Praise!), August Toplady’s *Rock of ages, cleft for me* (also try Kendrick’s new tune and chorus at <http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/songs/sheetmusic/rock.pdf>), and Edwin Mote’s *My hope is built on nothing less* with its presuppositional refrain “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand” (which also has a new tune, in *Praise!*, number 779).