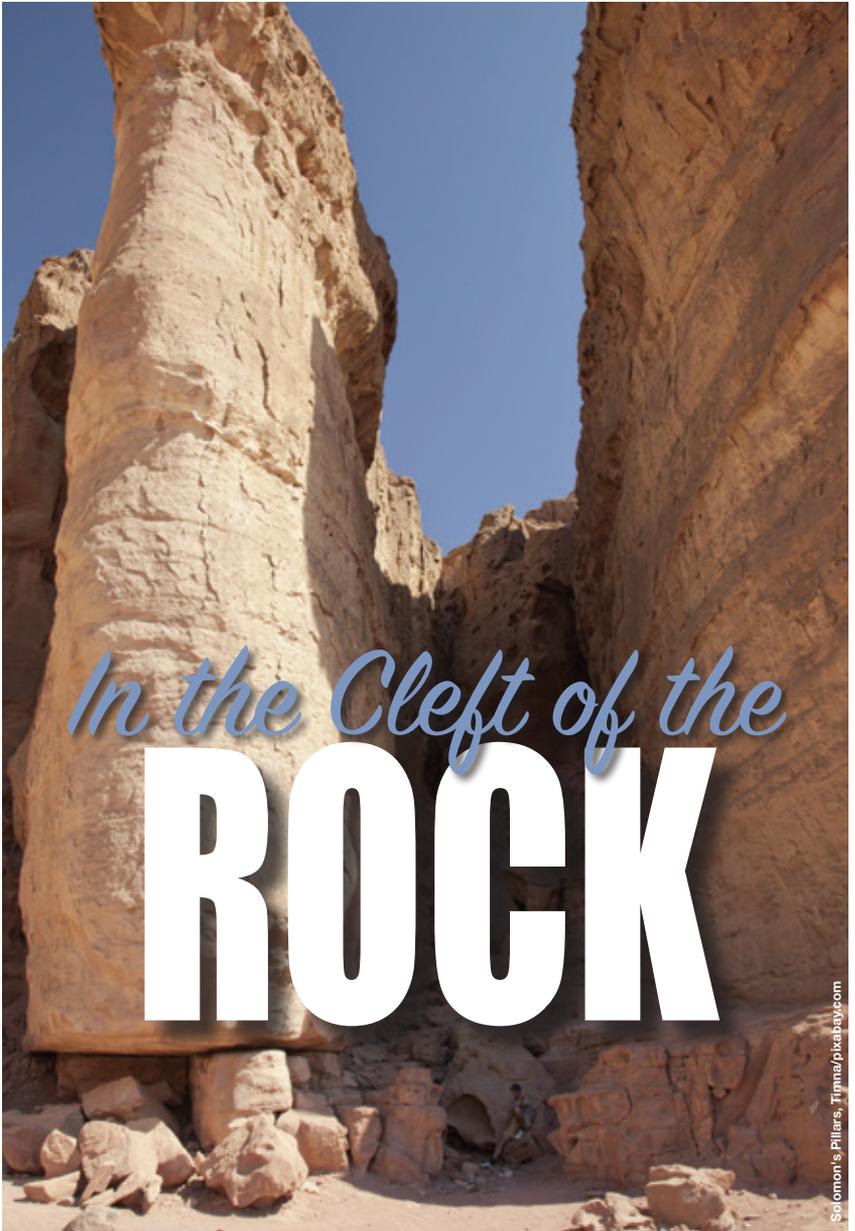


# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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## *In the Cleft of the* **ROCK**

Solomon's Pillars, Timna/pixabay.com

By Kathy DeGagne, *BFP Staff Writer*

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

*"The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock!  
Let the God of my salvation be exalted."*

Psalm 18:46



**THE WILDERNESS OF THE NEGEV** is one of the most stunning landscapes on the face of the earth. The desert consists of rocky escarpments of limestone, giant boulders and old riverbeds gouged by the pounding of flash floods, like fingers raking across hard ground.

It's beautiful—and brutal. In the summer, the temperatures can soar to a deadly 120° (49°C). One weekend, a group of us were foolishly hiking through the desert during the heat of the day. Someone noted that the temperature was 114° (45°C). Without lots of water, heatstroke can set in. The water in my water bottle was so hot it was like drinking water that had just been boiled in a kettle. I was suffering from dizziness and nausea and a dark veil was descending over my eyes. Getting out of the blinding sun was an immediate priority, and we scrambled into the cool shadow of some giant rocks at the base of a towering cliff. The relief was immense.

At that moment, I clearly understood what Isaiah meant when he described the restoration that comes from the *"shadow of a great rock in a weary land"* (Isa. 32:2). I knew then why Scripture described the Lord as a Rock. When we remain independent of God's care and protection, in essence, our steps become wayward and erratic; our vision, blurred and unfocused. The Lord says He will rescue those who love Him, He will protect those who trust in His name and He will be with us always (Ps. 91:14–15). That day, I knew the Lord as *my* Rock; He was *Adonai Tzuri*.

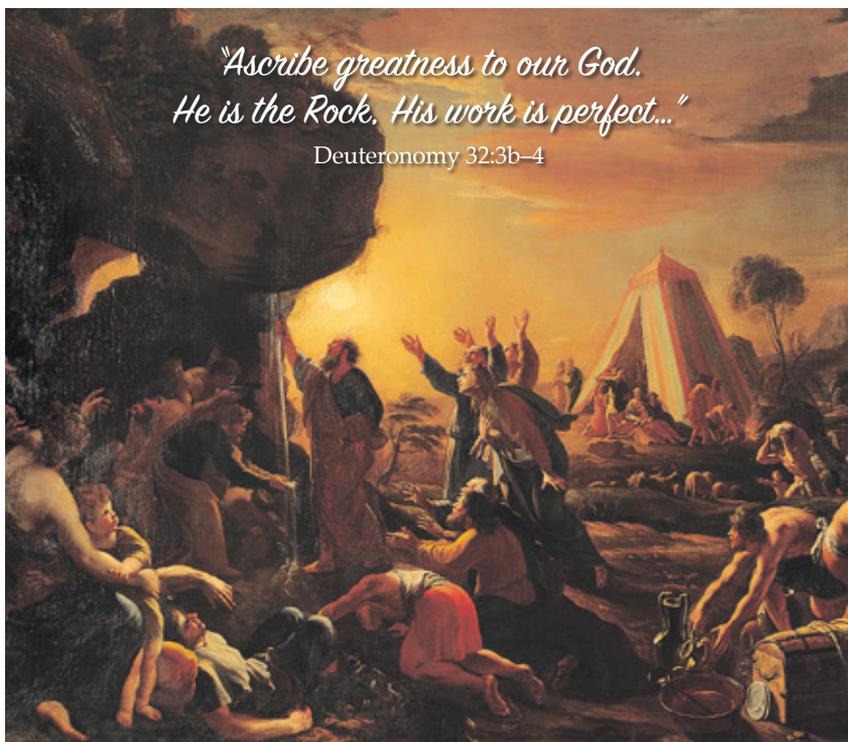
## Water from a Rock

In the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), the reference to God as our Rock is first found in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. As the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness of Sinai, the unbearable heat and thirst would have plagued them, just as it did my companions and me 3,000 years later.

Moses' ears were bombarded with desperate cries for water—from both humans and animals. *“Give us water, that we may drink,”* the people wailed. *“Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”* (Exod. 17:2a, 3).

In turn, Moses cried out to the Lord, and God said, *“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink”* (v. 6). Scripture doesn't tell us much more detail than that, but we can imagine their astonishment and joy as life-giving water gushed from the rock and they rushed forward to drink, have a good wash and fill their water skins and every container they could find.

Out of that powerful and miraculous experience, Moses proclaimed that God was the Rock. Rabbi Maimon noted that the Hebrew word *tzur*, translated rock when applied to Jehovah, suggests a fountain, source and spring (A. Clarke). To the children of Israel who were perishing of thirst in the desert, God demonstrated that He was their Sustainer, their very Source of life and the Fountain that would never run dry.





A “sailing” rock

## The Rolling Stone

According to an article by the Biblical Archaeology Society, there is a mysterious phenomenon in the desert called a “walking rock” or “sailing rock.” These rocks actually slide along a sandy desert floor of their own accord.

Intriguingly, the Apostle Paul speaks of a “spiritual rock” that *followed* the Israelites in the desert (1 Cor. 10:4). According to Paul, the Israelites were sustained in the wilderness by “*the spiritual Rock that followed them.*” We can be fairly certain that the spiritual rock Paul was describing was not one of these odd rolling rocks; but what did he mean when he said it followed them?

John Byron in an article in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* entitled “Paul, Jesus and the Rolling Stone” suggests that Paul was not the only one to express this concept of a “following” source of water:

In another first-century C.E. document known as Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities*, we read: “But as for his own people, he led them forth into the wilderness: Forty years did he rain bread from heaven for them, and he brought them quails from the sea, and a *well of water following them*” (10.7).

Both Paul and *Biblical Antiquities* conjecture that the water from the rock continuously watered the millions of Israelites and their livestock for the forty years

they wandered in the desert. A *midrash* (*Midrash Numbers Rabbah*) also says that a Rock/Well of living water (water that was flowing and not stagnant) accompanied the people through the desert.

In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul refers to Jesus (Yeshua) as “the Rock.” In the book of Ephesians, Jesus is referred to as the “chief cornerstone” (Eph.2:20) and the Apostle Peter calls Him “*The stone which the builders rejected.*” Many Christian scholars believe Jesus is, in fact, the moving “Rock,” who was present among the Israelites, providing them with the precious water they needed to sustain them in their journey through the harsh environment.

## In the Cleft of the Rock

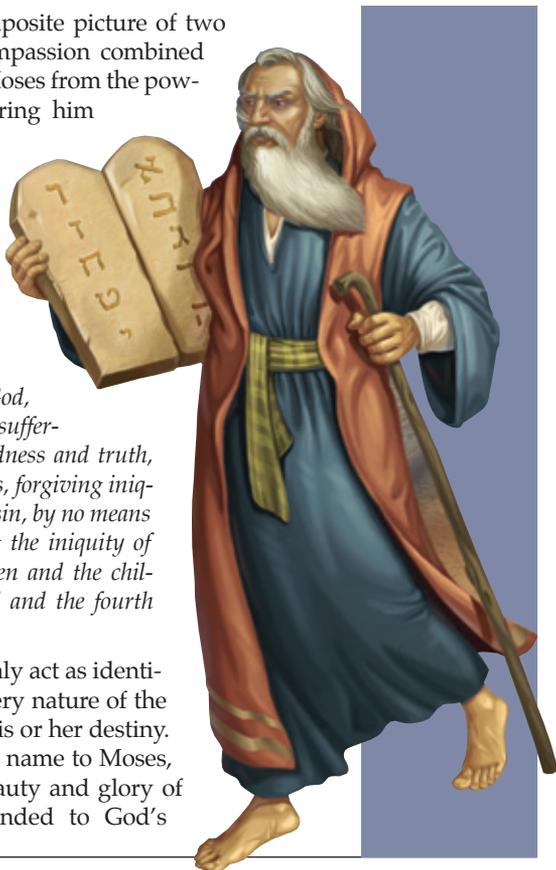
Later in Exodus, Moses’ concept of God as a Rock was powerfully reinforced. In this passage, Moses pleaded with God to show him His glory (Exod. 33:18). He wanted the reassurance that God’s presence would go with the Israelites into the Promised Land. But to see God face to face meant certain death. Therefore, the Lord said, “*Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by*” (vv. 21–22).

We have a beautiful composite picture of two aspects of God’s nature: compassion combined with power. God protected Moses from the power of His presence by covering him with His hand and hiding him in the cleft of a rock.

After Moses cut two new tablets of stone and ascended Mount Sinai once again, the Lord passed before him and proclaimed His name:

*The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation* (Exod. 34:6–7).

Names in the Bible not only act as identifiers but often point to the very nature of the individual, even indicating his or her destiny. God didn’t just proclaim His name to Moses, He proclaimed the truth, beauty and glory of His character. Moses responded to God’s



words by bowing his head toward the earth, and worshipping (v. 8). Our response should be the same. God wants us to know Him and to build our faith on that knowledge, to fill us with adoration and enlarge our wonder for the One who loves us.

## Hannah's Rock

One of the most beautifully soaring portions of Scripture is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, often deemed prophetic of a coming Messiah. It was sung by Hannah after the Lord gave her the desire of her heart: a son. In it are echoes of the song of Moses.

Hannah was childless and had wept and prayed for a child for years but it seemed as though heaven's doors were closed to her pleas. Yet she never wavered in the belief that one day God would grant her request. God was faithful, and in due time Hannah bore a son and named him Samuel which means "asked of God; heard by God."

To this once-childless woman, God had been faithful, the Rock on which she placed her trust, and she rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And, just as Moses had responded to God's faithfulness, Hannah worshipped, singing, *"No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God"* (1 Sam. 2:2).

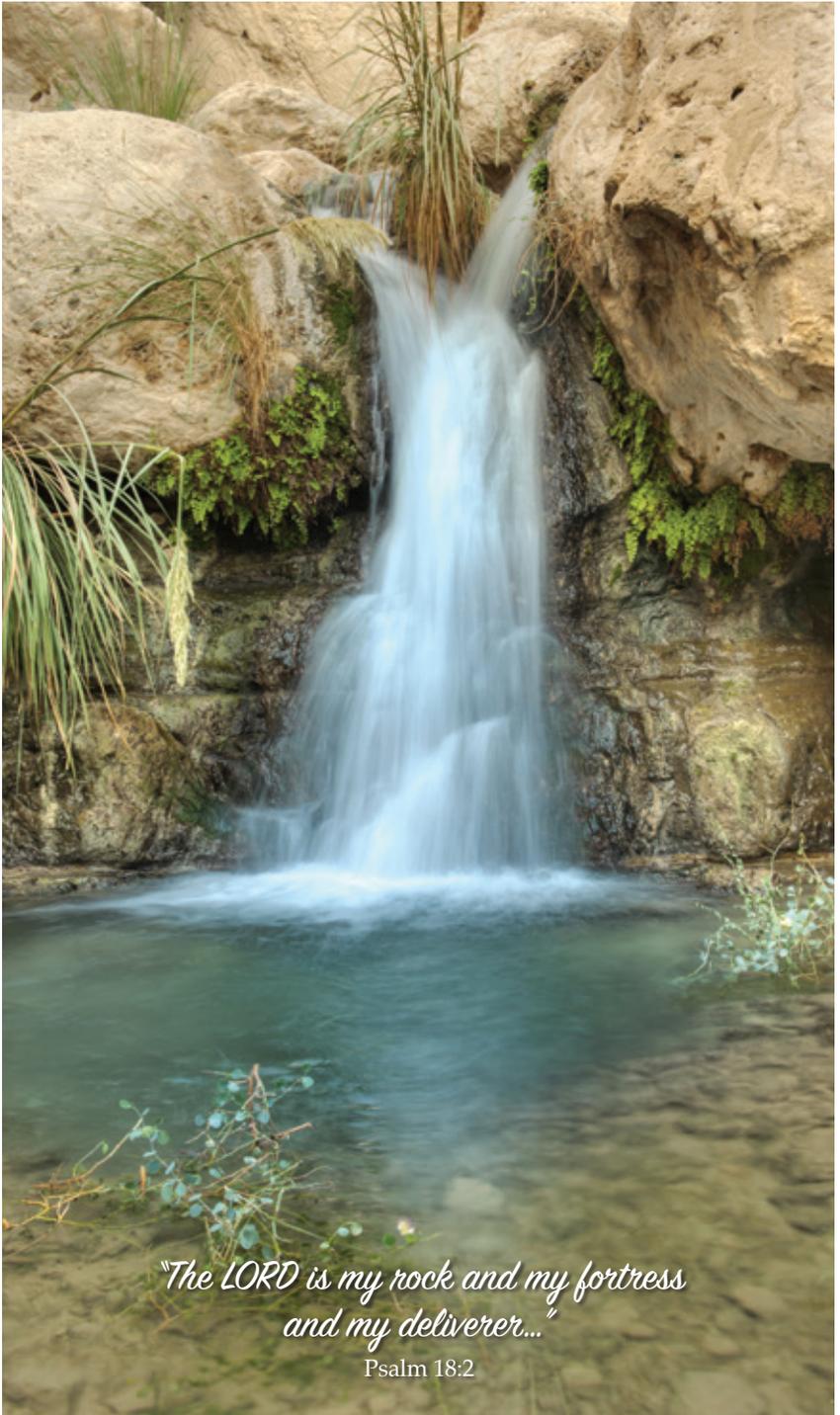
## My Rock and My Fortress

God's protection, His dependability, power and immutability are all depicted in the psalmist's reference to God as his Rock. David was a man familiar with the wilderness, on the run as he hid from the bloodlust of King Saul. In a dry and weary land, David would have known the intense heat of the sun and the refreshing coolness found in the shade of a rock or the deep shadows of a desert cave.

David likened God to his Rock, his Protector, his Keeper and the "shade upon his right hand" (Ps. 121:5). David was assured that in a time of scorching heat and pressure, God would shield him in security—physically and emotionally.

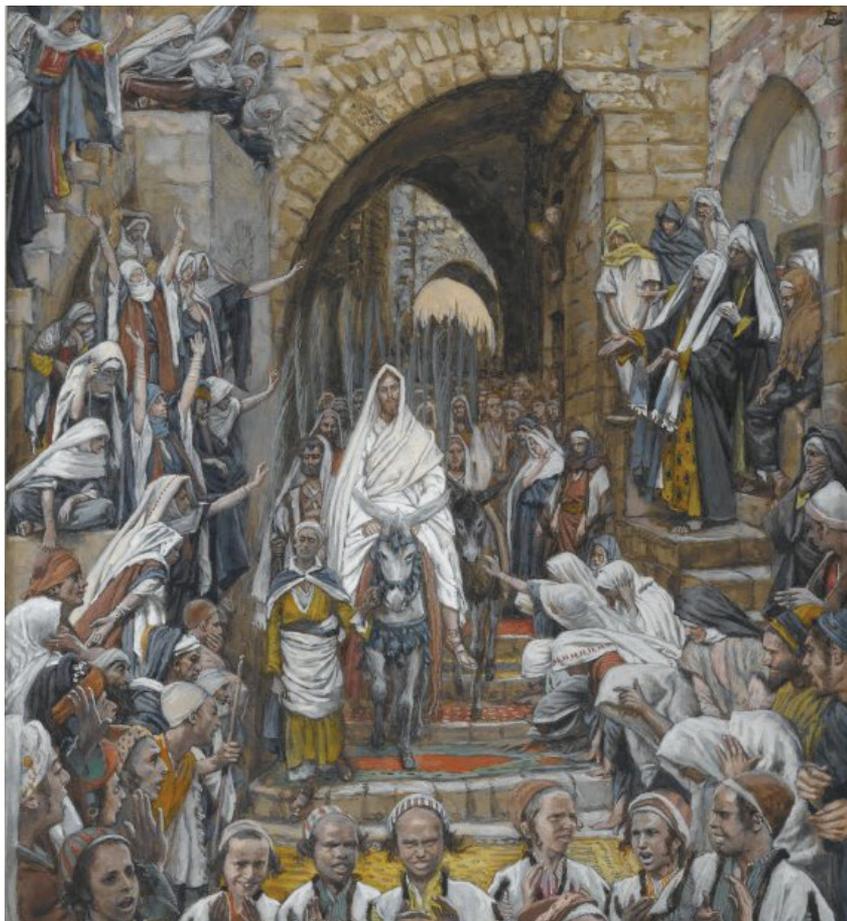
David frequently found refuge at the oasis of En Gedi, between the towering cliffs on either side of the En Gedi ravine (1 Sam. 23:29). There, the flowing springs provided plenty of water to drink, there were ibex (wild goats) to hunt as food and he could scramble into any of the nearby caves if Saul's army was in sight—3,000 soldiers commissioned to find David. It was in one of these caves near En Gedi that David silently snipped off the corner of Saul's robe (1 Sam. 24). He had eluded King Saul's traps for years and clearly God was actively ensuring his safety in very dangerous times.

David was standing on the firm foundation of the promises of his Rock. God had promised him the throne of Israel and his coronation would come to pass in God's perfect time. In the meantime, God could be trusted to do what He said He would do; and He would do it with the additional attention to David's well-being. David could declare, *"He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved"* (Ps. 62:2).



*"The LORD is my rock and my fortress  
and my deliverer..."*

Psalm 18:2



## The Living Rock

*"Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one." Isaiah 44:8*

In chapter 19 of the Gospel of Luke we find the story of Jesus descending the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. A multitude of people lined the roadway and spread their coats in His path and the disciples praised God with loud voices saying, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!"* (v. 38). This shouting annoyed some of the religious leaders who called to Jesus from the crowd demanding that He rebuke His disciples. He replied, *"I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out"* (v. 40).

Surely, stones crying out would be a supernatural event! Supernatural, certainly; but, Jesus clearly knew something that scientists have only discovered in the last century: rocks actually do make sounds. Their sounds are usually at lower

frequencies than can be discerned by the human ear, but several boulder fields around the world contain rocks that emit a clear metallic sound like chimes ringing when struck with a hammer.

Scientists applied the term “living stones” to this strange phenomenon, but this term is familiar to us because it was used by the Apostle Peter to describe Jesus. He called Him a Living Stone, “*rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.*” Paul went on to talk about believers in Him: “...*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

As Christians, we believe Jesus to be the Living Stone, the foundation on which the Church is built and firmly established. It could be that Peter was recalling the conversation at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus said, “*On this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” (Matt. 16:18). Peter understood who that Rock was, and proclaimed it here in 1 Peter: it was Jesus.

Christian teaching requires Jesus’s followers to be imitators of Him, also called to be “living stones” used to construct His Church. We are the spiritual house founded not on shifting sand but on the Rock (Matt. 7:24), able to stand firm in the midst of any storm because we are indwelt by His Spirit and fused to Him in unbreakable fellowship.

## A Sure Foundation

I come from a family of builders, architects and contractors. Much skill and pride goes into the design and construction of every building. Nevertheless, we are aware of the sad fact that one day these buildings will have outlived their usefulness, be torn down and replaced with something else.

Along the Mediterranean seashore by the ruins of the once-remarkable city of Caesarea Maritima, there are reminders of the city’s former grandeur in the partially restored theater and amphitheater. It must have been magnificent in its heyday, a tribute to the creative genius of its masterful architect and builder, King Herod the Great. But, in spite of Herod’s efforts to leave an everlasting legacy of architectural splendor behind him, these structures are all in ruins now, the city’s



famous harbor lying beneath 15 feet (4.5 m.) of sea, giving us only glimpses of what must have once been a glorious monument to Herod himself.

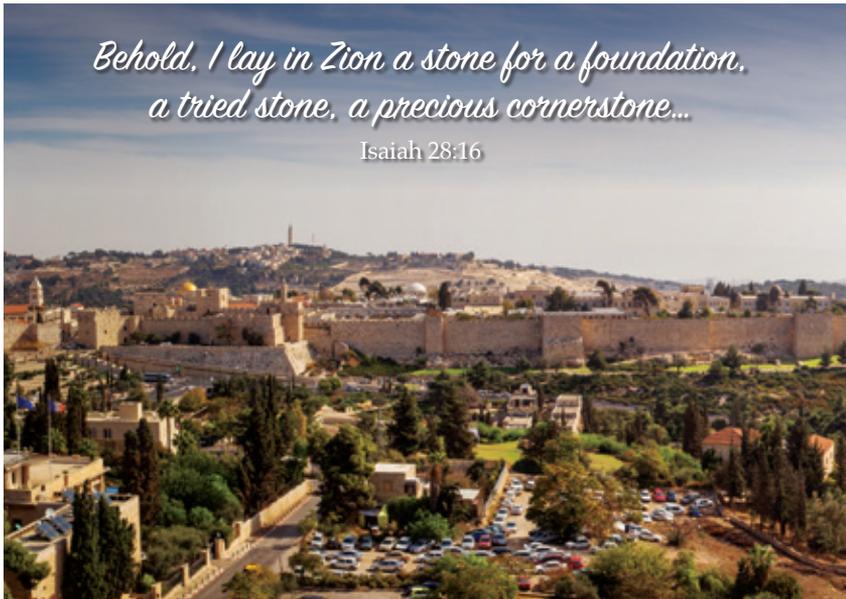
The crumbling legacy that Herod left behind was built on the soft, unstable sand of the Mediterranean coastline, inundated by storms, waves and earthquakes. In the same way, Herod built his trust on the shifting sands of his own genius—but it came with a built-in expiration date. If we want our legacies to endure, we must build our foundation on the One whose name and nature is Everlasting.

## The Foundation Stone

*“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.’”* Isaiah 28:16

Jerusalem, also known as Zion, is central to the Jewish people, and Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) is the spiritual hub around which all things rotate. Scripture tells us that Mount Moriah was the site of the binding and near-sacrifice of Isaac (in Hebrew called the *Akedah*). Abraham “*lifted up his eyes*” and saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket, and he sacrificed the ram in place of his son. “*And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide [Adonai Jireh], as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided’*” (Gen. 22:14).

On Mount Moriah, Solomon built the Temple to the Lord and God promised that His eyes and His heart would dwell there perpetually (1Kings 9:3). His presence would rest forever on a slab of limestone bedrock called the Foundation Stone, known in Hebrew as *Even haShetiyah*. Jewish tradition says that the world was created and founded on this Foundation Stone, the exact center of the world,



beginning from this central point and then spreading out in all directions. *Shetiyah* can mean “drinking” in Hebrew, because the sages believed that beneath the Foundation Stone rested the source of all the drinking water in the world.

## The Rock of Israel

The foundation of Scripture has been integral to the State of Israel since its rebirth on May 14, 1948. In the Israeli Declaration of Independence, Israel’s founding fathers made sure to include the statement, “placing our trust in the Rock of Israel.” Though the statement was opposed by one secularist, the wording stood. David Ben-Gurion said, “Each of us, in his own way, believes in the ‘Rock of Israel’ as he conceives it.”

Some choose to interpret the phrase as referring to the actual land, *Eretz Israel*. To those of faith, however, the “Rock of Israel” (*Tzur Yisra’el*) could only be synonymous with the “God of Israel.” *Tzur* refers to a rock, a cliff or even a mountain. As the word suggests, Israel’s state would be firmly established on Israel’s God—a God of strength, endurance and trustworthiness who would ensure the new nation’s safety in a very hostile neighborhood. As history has proven, God has indeed been faithful to His people, surrounding them with His sovereign protection, covering them with His hand and hiding them tenderly in the cleft of the Rock.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (*Yeshua*)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or O.T.) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or N.T.)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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