

## "A Wonderful Savior" (A Hymn Study)

**Intro: We know that every time we worship the Lord in song, we need to reflect of upon the meaning of the words we sing. Sometimes the meaning is self-evident. In other cases, the song uses imagery that may be less clear, but when properly understood even more meaningful to us. There is one song in particular that fits in that category. Consider these words from a familiar song:**

*"He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry thirsty land; he hideth my life in depth of his love and covers me there with his hand, and covers me there with his hand."*

**What exactly does that mean? What is the basis for this song? Let's do a hymn study tonight. This song is based on the experience of Moses recorded in Exodus 34.**

### **Background of the hymn**

#### **God's revelation at Mount Sinai & Israel's sin**

You are looking Jebel Musa (Arabic name) or "Har Sinai" (Hebrew) or what we call "Mount Sinai." It was at this mountain that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3). And it was here that He promised Moses would return with His people after being delivered from Egyptian bondage.

And so when Moses brought the people here, God descended upon the mountain in an awesome theophany (Ex. 19).

Yet God's awesome appearance had little ultimate effect upon the people. While Moses was in the mountain receiving the law, the people were dancing before the golden calf they had created.

In Exodus 33 God urged Moses to just go ahead to the Promised Land with the people without Him, indicating that He could not go with them for a moment lest He end up destroying them.

The whole event had a powerful effect upon Moses. His piety stands in stark contrast to the fickleness of His fellow-Israelites.

#### **Moses' intercession and God's offer**

Moses urged God with the tenderest plea to not send them away without going with them:

*Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Ex. 33:12-16)*

God responds in the affirmative:

*And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." (Exodus 33:17)*

### **Moses bold request and God's answer**

In contrast to the people, though Moses had already seen the most awesome manifestations of God's greatness, it only whetted his appetite to know more about God. And he boldly asks God for an even fuller revelation of Himself:

*Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." (Ex. 33:18)*

The Hebrew word for "glory," unlike the Greek word "doxa" does not use the imagery of light, but rather weight or heaviness.

What Moses sought was a fuller revelation of God's greatness, magnitude, and impressiveness.

God's response to Moses request

*And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Ex. 33:19-23)*

### **Moses' "vision" of God**

Moses ascended Mount Sinai with two tablets to replace the broken tablets he had broken when he witnessed Israel's unfaithfulness. It was then that Moses experienced the promised vision of God:

*Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (Ex. 34:5-7)*

Moses that day learned that to see God's glory is know the characteristics of His nature, the declaration of what His name stands for.

He is compassionate (racham) and gracious (chanan)  
Slow to anger (lit. long in wrath)  
Abounding in love (chesed) and faithfulness (emet)  
Maintaining love (chesed) to thousands  
Forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin  
Yet punishing the guilty (showing the lingering effects of sin upon those who follow after)

### **The Meaning of the Hymn (#508)**

The poet of our song has done some deep thinking about the experience of Moses and how we as God's people might relate to it.

**Chorus: He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land; He hideth my soul in the depth of His love and covers me there with His hand--and covers me there with His hand.**

Just as God hid Moses in the cleft of a rock in order that he might "see" Him, so Jesus hides our soul in the cleft of a rock so that we might see Him.

Just as Mount Sinai is surrounded by wilderness that is dry and barren, so we are hidden in a rock that "shadows a dry, thirsty land." (More on this in a moment)

The "cleft" in which we are hidden is the love of God. He allows us to see His glory manifested in His love; yet protects us from the frightful consequences of seeing His face.

*For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (Jn. 1:16-18)*

The verses of the song fill out this basis idea:

**Verse one: "A wonderful Savior is Jesus my lord, a wonderful savior to me, He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock where rivers of pleasure I see."**

The poet knows that just as God saved Israel in the OT from bondage, so Jesus has saved us from bondage to sin: "A wonderful savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful savior to me"

He knows that just as God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and revealed His glory to Him, so Jesus also "hides our soul in the cleft of the rock," revealing His nature to us.

He knows that Jesus' revelation to us brings "rivers of pleasure" in bold contrast to the "dry and thirsty" life we have lived. He claimed: *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* (Jn. 7:37-38)

**Verse two: "A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, He taketh my burden away; He holdeth me up and I shall not be moved, He giveth me strength as my day.**

Now the poet delves further in the nature of the salvation Jesus has brought to us.

He takes away the burden of our sin.

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (Mt. 11:28)*

He gives us spiritual security (He holds me up and I shall not be moved)

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, (Jude 24)*

He gives us the strength we need each day to face the temptations of life.

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13)*

**Verse three: "With numberless blessings each moment He crowns, and, filled with His fulness divine, I sing in my rapture, oh, glory to God, for such a Redeemer as mine!**

Now the poet thinks of what the salvation and provisions of Jesus effect in his life:

He crowns each moment with numberless blessings.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (Eph. 1:3)*

Now filled with the fulness of God, he sings with rapture or great joy praise to God because of the redeemer we have.

*and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. (Eph. 3:19)*

**Verse four: "When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise to meet Him in clouds of the sky, His perfect salvation, His wonderful love, I'll shout with the millions on high."**

*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thes. 4:17)*

**The Message of the Hymn**

**Jesus gives us a vision of the nature of God.**

**Through his salvation we are given the water of life that quenches our spiritual thirst.**

**Through his love we are given what we need to be secure in His love.**

**Through his blessings, we are motivated to offer Him joyous worship.**

**Through his hope, we can anticipate the resurrection when we will join with all the redeemed to praise Him forever.**

**Let's sing the hymn together!**

**Conclusion: As wonderful as it is to see the glory of God's love now through His Son Jesus Christ, there is yet reserved for the people of God the experience of all experiences-- one which no human has been able to bear since the beginning of time. That experience is described in Rev. 22:4: "and they shall see His face."**