

The “Following Rock” of 1 Corinthians 10

1 Cor 10.4 reads:

ἔπινον γὰρ ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας, ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός.

For they were all drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

This text raises two important questions.

- 1) How was the rock “following” the Israelites?
- 2) How can Paul claim that the rock was Jesus?

Let’s go to the relevant texts!

First, check the margin notes of the Greek text, and you should find there references to three OT passages, namely: Exodus 17.6; Numbers 20.7-11; Ps 78.15f.

Both the Exodus and Numbers passage describe a time when Israel complained about lack of water and Moses struck a rock from which water poured forth. How many water-giving rocks are there in the wilderness? Either there are two rocks... or the one rock is following them.

Do we have any other evidence for such a claim?

Take a look at Psalm 78.15f. that was listed.

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^{NAU} He split the **rockS** <06697> in the wilderness And gave *them* abundant drink like the ocean depths.

^{LXE} he clave a rock in the wilderness, and made them drink as in a great deep.

^{BGT} διέρρηξεν πέτραν ἐν ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἐπότισεν αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐν ἀβύσσῳ πολλῇ

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^{NAU} He brought forth streams also from the **rock** <05553> And caused waters to run down like rivers.

^{LXE} And he brought water out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down as rivers.

^{BGT} καὶ ἐξήγαγεν ὕδωρ ἐκ πέτρας καὶ κατήγαγεν ὡς ποταμοὺς ὕδατα

The NRSV is correctly translating the Hebrew in that the plural of צִוּר *tsur* (use the NAU to get this information) is used in v15. But note that the LXX uses the singular! In v16, the NRSV is again correctly translating the singular of a different Hebrew word, סֵלָה *sela*. So how many rocks are there? The LXX certainly offers the possible understanding of there being only one rock, and it is confirmed by the rendering of a Hebrew plural with a singular and translating two different Hebrew words with the same Greek one, πέτρα.

We need to make a bit of a jump next, but anyone familiar with their Scripture would recall that there was actually one more incidence of water in the wilderness: Numbers 21.16-21.

Here are some things to try to discover.

A word search of πέτρα would also turn up Ps 114 (LXX 113):8. What are the two Greek words that are used in this text to describe the rock?

The πέτρα search would also turn up WisSol 11.4. What words are used to describe the rock here?

Search for πέτρα in Philo. (This can be done easily in BibleWorks.) There are not many references, but look at the one in *Allegorical Interpretation* (=Leg) 2.86. What words are used to describe the rock and what else is said about this rock?

Look up how Numbers 20.8-13 is translated in the Targumim. In BibleWorks, use the PJE version.

Online you can check it out at: <http://targum.info/pj/pjnum19-22.htm>

Now follow up with the next reference to the waters in Numbers 21.17-20.

Especially note what the Jerusalem Targum records. (It is embedded in the Pseudo-Jonathan text in the online text. It is JTE in BibleWorks..)

Using the [index of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha](#), find a reference to Numbers 21.16-20.

(Note that LAB = Book of Biblical Antiquities = Pseudo-Philo) When was this book written and

where? Check online at: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/pseudophilo.html>

Now look up the reference online at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/bap/index.htm> . Be sure to read the footnote to the verse.

Now see what Ginzberg records in his *Legends of the Jews* online at: http://philologos.org/_eb-lotj/vol3/contents.htm

Read both the sections on “Miriam’s Well” and “The Waters of Meribah.”

You should have a fairly clear idea by now that the “following rock” was not an innovation by Paul.

But why does he claim that the rock πέτρα is Christ?

Let’s see what you can discover within the NT that might support this claim!

As a reward, now go to e-Catena of the Ante-Nicene Fathers at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080125125119/http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/e-catena/>.

(Note: You can install this helpful tool into BibleWorks as an addon. Download/unzip/install [this file](#).)

Look up the links to 1 Cor 10.4 and find what Origen in his Commentary on Matthew says.

Still with all these resources, you would miss one final nice one that you could discover by searching for πέτρα in the ANF of BibleWorks (use the ANF database, then look up TBa 9), but I’ll give it to you straight: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.vi.iii.ix.html>