

Rock of Ages

♩ = 82

B \flat

1. Rock of Ag - es, cleft for me, let me
 2. Not the la - bors of my hands can ful -
 3. Noth ing in my hand I bring, sim - ply
 4. While I draw this fleet - ing breath, when mine

hide my - self in Thee. Let the wa - ter and the blood, from Thy
 fill Thy law's de - mands. Could my zeal no res - pite know, could my
 to the cross I cling. Na - ked, come to Thee for dress; help - less,
 eyes shall close in death, when I soar to worlds un - known, see Thee

wound - ed side which flowed, be of sin the dou - ble
 tears for - ev - er flow, all for sin could not a -
 look to Thee for grace. Foul, I to the foun - tain
 on Thy judg - ment throne, Rock of Ag - es, cleft for

cure; save from wrath and make me pure.
 tone; Thou must save, and Thou a - lone.
 fly; wash me, Sav - ior, or I die.
 me, let me hide my - self in Thee.

Rock of Ages is an accessible, well-known hymn with intriguing backstory and lyrical depth. It was written by the unusually named English pastor Augustus Montague Toplady in the 1700s. More than 80 years after its publication in 1776, a story was fabricated about him being caught in a storm and finding shelter in a rock. To this day, the supposed “Rock of Ages” sits at Burrington Combe in England. But the real backstory is no less interesting.

Toplady developed Reformed theological convictions later into his life and ministry which brought him into sharp conflict with contemporary John Wesley. Ironically, the wording for the hymn’s imagery and theme came from the preface in one of Wesley’s hymnals, which reads, “O Rock of Israel, Rock struck and cleft for me . . . streams of blood and water which gushed from Thy side.” Toplady adapted these words in the closing of a sermon, saying: “Look to the blood of the Covenant, and say to the Lord from the depths of your heart: *Rock of ages, cleft for me / Let me hide myself in Thee / Foul I to the fountain fly / Wash me Savior or I die.*” He finished the rest of the hymn that same year.

After his untimely death at age 38, later pastors and writers changed some of Toplady’s other lyrics for the better. His original “*save me from its guilt and power*” improved to “*save from wrath and make me pure.*” And mercifully, we sing “*when mine eyes shall close in death*” instead of “*when my eye-strings break in death.*”

But the words that persevere from the Toplady’s original carry the same biblical and lyrical genius. A cleft rock provided refuge for Moses from the holy radiance of God’s glory. Another provided water for the people of Israel. The Cornerstone Himself was cleft, struck for our sins on the cross, and from his side poured water and blood. And what is our only response? Forsake all sin and self-righteousness and cleave—that is, cling—to the Rock of Ages for salvation, refuge, and eternal life.

Scripture to consider:

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|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| Exodus 33 | Isaiah 26 | 1 Corinthians 10 |
| Psalms 18 | John 10 | Ephesians 2 |
| Psalms 95 | John 19 | Philippians 3 |

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7

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