

*"But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."* As a result of a spear being thrust into Jesus’ side, and presumably penetrating his heart, both water and blood flowed from that wound. When the soldier came to break Jesus’ bones to hasten death, he found Jesus lifeless, but to remove all doubt, he thrust his spear into His side.

Many physiological reasons have been suggested to explain why both water and blood came from His side. The idea advanced by some medical doctors is that the spear pierced the pericardium, which is a membrane that surrounds the heart. From this punctured membrane, both blood and clear fluid, or water, came from His side. The separation of blood and clear fluid is pointed to as evidence that Jesus was already dead, as that is what happens when a human heart stops pumping; fluids separate and settle. The point is, Jesus was really and truly deceased, which is a matter of ultimate significance. Scripture makes the claim: Jesus died. The description of the event in the John’s gospel corroborates this claim, providing a physical post-mortem for anyone to examine.

Yet there is even more to it than that. The refusal of the soldiers to break His legs and the piercing of His side with a spear were marks of prophecy. In fact, the Roman soldiers fulfilled two prophecies. In order that it might be fully known beyond all doubt that Jesus was the Messiah God promised to send, the prophets of the Old Testament gave many ‘marks of identification.’ All of these had to be found in the person who would be the great King and Savior. One prophecy fulfilled by the Roman soldiers is stated by John in verse 36, "For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." This is a quote of Exodus 12:46. “Not one of His bones shall be broken” was a command of God to the Jewish people about their Passover lambs; the Passover lamb put to death at each Passover Meal. The Passover lamb was a picture of the Messiah. The Apostle Paul interprets this for us in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "For even Christ our Passover lamb is sacrificed for us." As Israel was under command not to break a bone of the Passover Lamb, so this Roman soldier was destined not to break a bone of Jesus’ body. The soldier didn't know it, but God saw to it that no argument could be brought against Jesus as the ultimate, once-and-for-all Passover Lamb.

In this same passage, John quotes another prophecy fulfilled by the water and blood from the side of Jesus, "They shall look on him whom they pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). The complete prophecy reads like this, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look on me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son, and they shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." A similar prophecy is made in Zechariah 13:1, "In that day a fountain shall be opened up for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Zechariah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 people mourned in repentance and were cleansed

and forgiven in baptism, cleansed in a fountain opened here, at the cross, with a spear, the water and the blood of Jesus the source, the wellspring, of all redemption.

The water and the blood mentioned in this passage has motivated writers to produce some of our greatest hymns. One of those is "Rock of Ages." The first verse says, "Rock of ages, cleft for me; Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

What does it mean to call Jesus the Rock of ages? It is, of course, poetry—poetry with a purpose. The song speaks of hiding ourselves in this Rock, and then it connects the water and blood of Jesus as the way to hide in Him. That water and the blood cleanses us of two things, the guilt of sin and the power of sin.

The Rock in this hymn is a rock that has been cleft, meaning it is split—there is a space in which a person can fit and hide and feel protected. This hymn is partially based on the rock in Exodus 33:22. There, Moses hid in a cleft, a hollow place in a rock that protected him from the glory and holiness of God when He walked by. It was a hiding place, a place of protection because God was near, and Moses could not survive the close presence of the Lord. The hymn writer was expressing a marvelous truth by comparing Christ to a Rock in whom we can hide from the holiness of God in the face of judgment.

The hymn tells us how we hide in Christ, our Rock of protection by saying, "Let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power." The great truth of the hymn is that you can find a hiding place from the wrath of God against sin in Jesus. The way into that hiding place is through the water and blood that flowed from His wounded side. This blood and water not only cleanses us of the guilt of sin but also the power of sin. It removes both the consequence of sin and the attraction of sin. It does that by pointing you to something greater—to the One who really died so that you could really live. Jesus is our Rock, your hiding place, He covers you in the sight of His Father.

The spear of that soldier opened the most precious stream to ever flow. It fulfilled the prophetic words of Zechariah, "They will look on the one they have pierced. In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." That fountain has been opened also for you. The stream flows for you. Let it draw you to the side of Jesus.