

being beside the River Arnon, which is in the northern part of the land of Moab. Thus the interpretation that considers Sela to mean Petra involves interpreting the verse without reference to its context.

There is no reason to think that Sela here stands for the Edomite town of Petra. There were many rocky places in the land which Moab occupied, and Sela could just as well represent the generally rocky nature of Moab itself.

A Plea for Help

The second verse offers no difficulty. It shows the daughters of Moab in flight and suffering beside the fords of the River Arnon. Various opinions are held regarding the third verse. Someone is calling upon someone else to give help to refugees. The statement, "make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday" is a vivid portrayal of a refuge, under the figure of a rock -- a figure which is rather common in the Old Testament. It finds expression in one of our great hymns, in the words: "The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land." Isaiah describes the shadow as being so strong that it is like night in the midst of noonday.

After asking help for the outcasts, the verse continues: "for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." As it stands in the English translation it seems to ask for help on the ground that the power of the enemies has already been destroyed. In this case it would surely seem that help would no longer be needed. Actually the Hebrew phrases do not contain a time element. They express a situation, and whether it is past, present, or future must be inferred from the context. Literally it does not say "the extortioner is at an end" but "the end of the extortioner." This could mean the extortioner "was at an end," or "is at an end" or "will be at an end." If we interpret the phrases as applying to the future, as is recommended by many commentators, a reasonable sense is secured from the verse. It then means: "Give help to my outcasts for the present. The help will not be needed long. The oppressors will soon come to an end." The reasonableness of this interpretation is apparent when we note that