

How to Do Expository Bible Teaching (Part 6 of 9: The Mount Rushmore Test)

Historic Faith Series on Expository Teaching

XV. The Mount Rushmore Test

- a.* In a prior section we discussed the “three levels” that early Christians considered when they read the Old Testament stories.
 - i.* **Level 1** - Storyline (the facts and events of what happened)
 - ii.* **Level 2** - Moral lessons for us to learn from
 - iii.* **Level 3** - Foreshadowings of things to come (Christ, the kingdom of God, heaven, the Christian life, salvation, the cross, Day of Judgment, Satan, etc.)
- b.* They did not necessarily see all three levels present in every story in the Old Testament. Some of the stories might have levels 1 and 2 only, or 1 and 3 only, for example.
- c.* On the other hand, they did not believe that all of the level 3 foreshadowings were fully explained by the New Testament writers. The early Christian writers saw that there was more in there.
 - i.* Some of the foreshadowings are touched on *but not fully developed* in the New Testament.
 - 1.* For example, Peter (**Acts 3**) and Stephen (**Acts 7**) both point to Jesus as fulfilling the prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** that Jesus was the promised prophet “like Moses” that God would “raise up”.
 - a.* In *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3, Eusebius mentions about a dozen of the extraordinary ways in which Jesus was like Moses, and then comments in effect, “I don’t have time to explain all the others...you can go find them on your own”.
 - b.* Eusebius is right on that one. There are *dozens of extraordinary similarities* if you look for them in **Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**.
 - 2.* Another example where the analogy (level 3) is touched on *but not fully developed* is in **1 Corinthians 5**. When Paul addresses immorality in the church, he references the **Exodus** story with

the Passover Lamb and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (removing all the yeast from the households). He writes:

- a. "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore, purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**, NKJV)
- b. In this case, only a few elements from this allegorical prophecy are discussed (the Passover Lamb foreshadowing Christ, and removal of the yeast foreshadowing repenting from sin).
- c. *Other parallels* to Christ that we can see in the Passover Lamb story that were not discussed by Paul in **1 Corinthians 5** include:
 - i. Blood of the sacrificed Lamb to save God's people.
 - ii. Lamb was "without blemish", reflecting the fact that Jesus would be without sin.
 - iii. None of the Lamb's bones were to be broken.
 - iv. Lamb to be sacrificed at twilight on the evening of the Passover feast.
 - v. Memorial meal consisting of the flesh of the sacrificed Lamb would be celebrated by God's people regularly thereafter.
- ii. There is no attempt to systematically catalog all the Old Testament prophecies by the apostles or other New Testament writers. Generally, they are bringing them to bear only as needed to support some particular point they are trying to make in a speech or letter.
 1. For example, throughout the book of **Acts** we see the apostles and other disciples using Old Testament prophecies about Jesus (both 'Eastern' and 'Western' style) as evidence to convince unbelievers.
 2. In their letters, the New Testament writers use the Old Testament stories to reinforce points they are trying to make to believers regarding things like:

- a. Holiness and separation from the world.
 - b. Perseverance in the face of suffering.
 - c. Salvation of the Gentiles, without their having to follow the Law of Moses.
 - d. Submitting to those in authority.
 - e. The dangers of sexual immorality and other sins of the flesh.
 - f. Importance of prayers of the righteous.
- d. *We know for certain* that whenever Jesus, the apostles or one of the New Testament writers gives an explanation that something in the Old Testament was there as a foreshadowing for us (like the bronze serpent or Passover Lamb), this connection is true and accurate. They are writing and speaking *under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit*.
- e. However, what should we do if we see one (or more) early Christian writers commenting on something in the Old Testament, regarding a possible foreshadowing *that the New Testament writers say nothing about*?
- i. Is it a legitimate foreshadowing designed and placed in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit? Or are the possible parallels just a *coincidence*, or the fruit of an *overactive imagination* on their part?
 - 1. How can we tell?
 - 2. *What do we do* when we encounter things like that, when we are not sure?
 - ii. When I began reading the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, I started encountering claims by early Christian writers regarding specific prophecies and foreshadowings that were not referenced in the New Testament. The first few of these that I encountered, I must admit, seemed a bit far-fetched to me. I was not persuaded that these were legitimate prophecies pointed out by some early Christian writers that seemed highly speculative (and doubtful) to me.
 - iii. *How can we tell* if the similarities between details in OT stories and events later fulfilled in the NT are just a coincidence, or planned and put there deliberately woven into the fabric of the story by the Holy Spirit?
 - 1. **My Question:** Was this (the parallels indicating a possible prophetic foreshadowing) *there by design*, or was it *just a coincidence*?

2. I am by nature a skeptical person, and question almost everything.
- iv. When I see a theory of a foreshadowing put forward by some early Christian writer (or confirmed by multiple writers), or perhaps I “see” (or imagine I am seeing) a similar pattern myself, I need to put it to the test. I am reminded of a statement in *Elementary Lessons on Logic*, by W. Stanley Jevons (originally published 1888):
 1. “...the great experimentalist is he who ever has a theory or even a crowd of theories or ideas upon his mind, but is always putting them to the test of experience and dismissing those which are false. The number of things which can be observed and experimented on are infinite, and if we merely set to work to record facts without any distinct purpose, our records will have no value. We must have some opinion or some theory to direct our choice of experiments, and it is more probable that we hit upon the truth in this way than merely by haphazard. But the great requisite of the true philosopher is that he is perfectly unbiased and abandons every opinion as soon as facts inconsistent with it are observed.

“It has been well said by the celebrated Turgot, that ‘the first thing is to invent a system; the second thing is to be disgusted with it;’ that is to say, we ought to have some idea of the truth we seek, but should immediately put it to a severe trial as if we were inclined to distrust and dislike it rather than be biased in its favor.

“Few men probably have entertained more false theories than Kepler and Faraday; few men have discovered or established truths of greater certainty and importance. Faraday himself has said that, ‘The world little knows how many of the thoughts and theories which have passed through the mind of the scientific investigator, have been crushed in silence and secrecy by his own severe criticism and adverse examination; that in the most successful instances not a tenth of the suggestions, the hopes, the wishes, of the preliminary conclusions have been realized.’”

- a. (Source: W. Stanley Jevons, *Elementary Lessons in Logic, Deductive and Inductive*, lesson 27, pp. 237-238; first published 1888)
- b. Some notes of explanation regarding people mentioned in the quote from Jevon’s book, whose names to many today are familiar:

- i. Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot was a famous French economist and statesman in the 18th century.
 - ii. Johannes Kepler was an early 17th century German mathematician and astronomer who came up with laws of planetary motion.
 - iii. Michael Faraday was a 19th century British scientist who made major contributions to the fields of electricity, electromagnetism and electrochemistry. He is considered one of the most influential scientists in history. He also was a devout Christian.
2. An important point made by Jevons in the above quote: A real truth-seeker in any field may come up with many ideas; but will seek to *test them objectively*. Often most of the ideas will be “crushed” by the investigator himself in silence and secrecy, and never see the light of day!
 - a. This reminds me of how, in my own profession of civil engineering, a structural designer will come up with a proposed mix for a concrete structure (a recipe consisting of water, stones, cement, lime, etc.). However, to test the strength of this mix a cylinder of it will be placed into a special machine where it is subjected to extreme high pressure, to test it to the point of failure (until it cracks).
- v. Sometimes, in reading the early Christian writers, or even just reading through stories in the Old Testament on my own, I wonder if what I am reading has allegorical significance.
 1. Does the story I am reading have an allegorical, ‘third level’ significance, foreshadowing things later revealed in Jesus and the New Testament?
 2. Is this a genuine foreshadowing woven into the text of the story by the Holy Spirit (like the Passover Lamb of Exodus), but not unexplained by the New Testament writers?
 3. Or is what I think I might be seeing just a product of an overactive imagination? Are the parallels and possible foreshadowings that I or an early Christian writer thinks we see just coincidences, in reality?
 4. How can I test it out ideas like that?

- vi. I have come up with something I refer to as “The Mount Rushmore Test”. Here is the explanation.
1. Imagine two people hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, 2002 or earlier, and coming upon the once-famous view from the north side of Cannon Mountain: *The Old Man in the Mountain*.
 - a. It looks kind of like the face of a man in very rough outline (forehead, nose, eye socket, chin, etc.).
 - b. An unusual formation, but clearly a natural feature that coincidentally has a few general similarities with a human profile.
 - c. (Note: in 2003 the extended lower part of the ‘face’ fell, and the formation left no longer looks anything like a human face profile.)
 2. Now imagine the same two people (who are completely unaware of the story of Mount Rushmore) are hiking in the Black Hills of South Dakota, turn a corner in the trail and suddenly see for the first time the famous sculpture on the side of Mount Rushmore.
 - a. It features the faces of four famous U.S. presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.
 - b. Each of the faces of the presidents is about 60 feet (18 meters) high.
 - c. On careful inspection, you can notice all the details of the presidents, from all angles (nostrils, Teddy Roosevelt’s moustache and distinctive glasses, Lincoln’s notable chin beard, recessed pupils and eyelids, lips, hairlines, etc.).
 - d. **Question:** Would any reasonable person assume that this also was *just a coincidence of nature*?
 - i. **Answer:** No way. Even though we don’t see the scaffolding and stone masons chiseling away the features, it is clear that someone designed this, on purpose. There are *way too many details* that match the reality of the presidents’ faces for this to have been just a coincidence!

- f. This is how I test out things I find that I think might possibly be Spirit-designed foreshadowings woven into the text of the Old Testament.
 - i. Questions I ask include:
 - 1. Are there *too many very specific details* included in a particular Old Testament story that parallel the fulfilled reality for this to have been just a coincidence?
 - 2. Are there details included in the story that might appear to be completely unnecessary to the thrust of the story, which happen to exactly line up with prophetic elements?
 - a. For example, in the story of the Passover Lamb, the people are told that when they eat the meal consisting of the flesh of the lamb, they *must not break any of its bones*. (**Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12**)
 - b. **Question:** It is not unusual to break a few bones when you are eating roasted meat. Why would God insist on that odd provision? And why would Moses bother to include such a seemingly irrelevant detail in the **Book of Exodus**?
 - i. **Answer:** We know the reason why, in hindsight. It foreshadowed the fact that when Jesus (the ultimate Passover Lamb) was crucified, 1400 years later, none of his bones would be broken (in contrast with what happened to the two other men crucified with him). (**John 19:31-36**)
 - 3. Were these details specifically designed into the story by someone (the Holy Spirit) for a greater purpose?
 - ii. This is a common-sense type of test, one that I use regularly.
 - 1. Plenty of ideas that I have, theories I come up with when thinking or initially drafting a lesson, never see the light of day because I cannot convince myself that this might just be a coincidence or my imagination.
 - 2. If you come up with an interesting insight or possible foreshadowing in your reason, I encourage you to have the same critical attitude. See if you can tear your own idea apart. Put it to the test.
- g. Even if it seems clear and compelling to me, my goal is to just present the evidence to my students and give them the freedom to draw their own

conclusions, even if several early Christian writers make the same point (but it is not found in the New Testament).

- i. Of course, any idea that *contradicts* what it says elsewhere in Scripture is to be *rejected outright*!