

I. Set Up

II. Introduction

A. This summer I was doing some reading about Illinois and pension funds. The articles made some references to economic theories and used terms I did not understand. So, I asked a friend – who has a lot of experience in finance – if he could explain it to me.

B. He didn't say anything. And so, after about ten seconds, I said, "Do you understand it? Yes. And you can explain it?" And he said, "yes." But he was still quite. And then he said, "I am trying to figure out how long it will take me to explain it to you."

C. Ouch. He eventually decided it would take more than an hour – so we went to a Cubs game and talked about it for about three hours.

D. In this series I am trying to do a lot. Perhaps too much. But do not get extra time.

E. At the first church I served, a retired professor came up to me early in my time there and said, "I was here before you got here. And I will be here when you leave." In other words, "don't mess with my church." And I laughed a bit and he started to walk away, and then he turned and said, "And by the way, no one gets saved after 12 noon. No long sermons."

F. This topic is a bit more 301 or 401 than 101 or 201, but I have to stay within time. I'm not sure I can do it, but my hope is that you have a growing sense of hope, of awe – of confidence – in who Jesus is and what God has done for you. One that provides a Thrill of Hope.

III. So let me back up and get a running start. Last week, I started by defining two terms.

A. I noted that *Advent*, which means arrival, refers to the quiet, dark and difficult period of waiting for Christ to arrive. It looks back to his first arrival in weakness as a child and also looks ahead to his return in power.

B. We then turned to *hope*, which is not wishful thinking or optimism. Instead, it refers to our confidence that a faithful God will remain faithful.

C. I then said, I'm going to assume you get that if the Bible is true – if God is God, Jesus is Savior, if Christmas really did happen, if the Incarnation really did happen, and the eternal Son of God added humanity to deity and entered the world through a virgin's womb. If He was what He claimed – the long-promised Messiah, fulfillment of prophecy, Son of Man and Savior of the World - and the things He promised are true, and in Him we find forgiveness, freedom, reconciliation with God, eternal life – then we have reason to hope. We have reason for joy and peace. It's all good.

D. Which means, the question is, it is true.

E. That set up a discussion about apologetics – the field of theology that defends the faith. It comes from I Peter 3:15

F. I mapped out some of the different approaches to apologetics before saying that one of the things that has really gotten my attention lately is the way the Bible holds together. The way it is not a collection of inspirational anecdotes and morality tales, but a story that holds together in ways we often miss.

G. If you have been around, you have likely seen me flash some of these visuals up.

1. The first suggests that the Old Testament – the 39 books that start with some universal history, but are almost exclusively the story of God calling the Abraham, making promises to him and his descendants, and then the path those descendants follow. All of which is wrapped up four hundred years before Christ is born.

2. The second slide notes that the New Testament draws heavily on the Old. By some counts, as much as forty percent of the New Testament materials are quotes from the Old Testament, or is in some other way directly building upon it.

3. But it's not just that, this book – which was written over 1,600 years, by 40 different authors in three languages and over three continents – has a unity that is stunning. That is shocking. And when you see it, it leads to awe and faith – a thrill of hope.

H. Last week I said, as an example, let's look at all the ways Jesus shows up in the Old Testament. I broke this list into four categories

1. First: the terms and titles used in the Bible to describe God, starting with Genesis 1, seem to assume Jesus. The terms used are plural. We looked a couple places in Genesis 1, such as Gen. 1:26 – let us make man in our image.

2. Second, were the prophecies: we started with the *proto-evangelion* in Genesis 3:15 – the first hint of the Gospel (the evangel), the Good News. Which at its core is a message of grace. God so loved that He sent a rescuer. Christianity is not: this I do, it is this He did. We do not earn, God saves. Genesis 3:15 is the first statement of the Gospel, and it is the first prophecy.

a) The Old Testament has all of these predictions about how the story will unfold. And we get all kinds of clues about the Rescuer. Genesis 3:15 is the first – I noted that it set up the Virgin Birth.

b) And then I noted a whole bunch of others: Isaiah 7 also predicts a virgin birth (conception), Micah 5:2 predicts the savior will be born in Bethlehem, there are passages in Zechariah that say, the Savior will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. There are about two hundred. I mentioned about ten. Prophecies are there is part to help us know what is coming, but also to prove that this story line is true.

3. Third up were the Christophanies – the times the pre-incarnate Jesus made cameo appearances. I argued He is the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18, he is the one who wrestled with Jacob in Genesis 32 and he was the fourth man in the furnace in Daniel 3.

4. And finally, I paraded a bunch of Old Testament objects and events that point ahead to him:

a) Sacrifices in general and Abraham and Isaac's big scene and all the Passover Lamb references in particular

b) The offices of Prophet, Priest and King – which find their fulfillment in Jesus.

c) I noted that Jesus was the new and better Temple, the new and better Job, the new and better Jonah and the fulfillment of Jacob's ladder.

d) I also pointed out how Jesus mirrors Israel¹ – He was called out of Egypt, spent 40 days (not years, days, but the number jumps out) in the desert. I noted how he called twelve apostles to reflect the 12 tribes of Israel and how He did what Israel did not – He kept the law.

I. And then I ended by saying, next week, rather than go wide I'd go deep. My goal last week was to give you some sense of the breadth of the argument. This week rather than help you see the forest for the trees, we'd focus on a tree.

IV. There are several passages we could turn to. I decided to highlight one I suspect you have not thought a lot about.

A. In fact, I suspect that it is one that, to the extent you have read it and remember it, you have shaken your head and wondered, "What in the world that was all about?"

B. It's Numbers 20, and it involves water from a rock.

C. Let me explain the context before we read it.

V. The Book of Numbers – which was written by Moses - is the fourth book in the Bible.

A. It is part of the Pentateuch – the term used of the first five books – which were all written by Moses and which are also referred to as The Law.

B. It gets its English title from the fact that it opens with a census – so there are lots of Numbers.

C. It's not called that in the Jewish Scriptures. It's the same book, only it has a different title. The term they use translatea "In the Desert," or "In the Wilderness." This is because it focuses on the forty years the Jews wander around in the desert.

1. The first ten chapters cover the first year, which takes place a Sinai.

2. The last ten chapters describe events on the plains of Moab, just east of the promised land, just prior to Joshua leading them in.

3. The middle ten cover their wandering for 40 years. An amazing time in which God keeps them alive – providing food and water and shade for about a million people and animals wandering in the desert.

D. So, our passage – which starts with Numbers 20:1: 1) picks up at the beginning of the last section; 2) and it is in many ways a mirror of what happened 39 years earlier. Back then – in events described in Exodus 17 – God had delivered them from Egypt, given them the law and told them to go into the Promised Land. They had balked. They sent a dozen spies in. Ten said we can't do it. Two said, God tells us we can, we must obey. The people do not have faith, they say no and so, as a result, God says, the only adults who will get to enter the Promised Land are Joshua and Caleb. And over the last forty years, everyone has been dying. There is now a new generation stepping up. And they are back in a similar situation.

VI. In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

A. This is one of the last deaths. But it's a big one. She is Moses sister. The one who watched him float down the Nile, get taken in by Pharaoh's daughter. They have a lot of history together.

B. This is a sad chapter. It opens with her death, and it ends with Aaron's death. He is Moses's brother. He had earlier served as his spokesman (think Press Secretary), and then he had been appointed leader of the priests. Together Miriam and Aaron also represent the generation that refused to obey and enter the promised land forty years earlier.

VII. In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron.

- A. The flash point is over water – which shouldn't surprise us. In Israel, it's often about water.
1. I have showed this slide before. It's a cross-section of Israel. The point is, the land was uniquely designed to foster faith. It has to rain or you die.
 2. You might think Israel looks like this, but it looks like this.
- B. It was not a small miracle that God kept one million former slaves alive in the desert for forty years. I have been in that desert. It's not a place you want to be for more than a few minutes. What I remember is everyone asking me to tell the bus driver to turn up the air conditioning because it was so hot.
- C. So God has supernaturally kept the Jews alive for forty years. They have needed food every day and water on an almost nonstop basis. But at this moment, they are out of water and so they complain. Which means we are having Déjà vu all over again.
- D. This is exactly what their parents did. It's essentially the same place and the same problem.

VIII. Verse 3 They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? 5 Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

- A. Oh, for the good old days, when we were back in Egypt. Things were great back in Egypt. Why did we ever leave? Why did we listen to you? (PLEASE: they were slaves in Egypt. They worked seven days a week and their children were being killed).
- B. The point is, this is exactly what their parents said. In other words, they are no better. They are a new generation, but they are not a better generation. Like their parents, they do not trust God. They lack faith.
- C. In their lack of faith they get a bit snippy and come after Moses, who: 1) didn't want the job; 2) who is just following the cloud; and 3) who stood up for them. He was a remarkable leader.
- D. This week I reread the accounts of Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, finding the golden calf. Breaking the tablets but then pleading with God for his people. He offers to take their punishment if only God will stay with them.²
- E. So, Moses didn't want the job; it's been very hard, and has done an exceptional work, but now they want his head. But because Moses is just following the cloud, they are really coming after God. They are finding fault with his provision. This is again about a lack of faith.

IX. **V6 Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.** The people complain. So, what do Moses and Aaron do? They go directly to God. So far so good.

X. **The Lord said to Moses, V8: “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”**

A. This sounds very much like Exodus 17, where Moses struck the Rock and water poured out and the people survived.

B. There is some debate about the staff. Some suggest that it is Aaron’s staff – the one that budded back in Numbers 17. If this is the case, it’s a symbol of grace. Others – and I am in this camp – think it’s Moses’s staff. The one that he used to strike the Nile and turn it to blood back in Exodus; the one he raised up to part the Red Sea. It is not a magic wand. There is never any suggestion of that. But it would remind the people of what God had done in the past.

C. I think what is going on here is that everyone is being reminded of the stories their parents had told them about God’s deliverance back in Rephidim – which is the story from Exodus 17.

D. And those of us who have been reading through the Bible should also be having *Deja vu* all over again. Same need, same guy, some staff.

E. However, the directive God gives is not exactly the same. Verse 8 doesn’t say strike the rock – like Exodus 17. It says: **“Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.”**

XI. **V9: So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.** This sounds like a good result, right? The people see the glory and power of God and they get their water. Right? No.

XII. **V12: But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”** Houston, we have a problem.

XIII. I am not going to keep reading. I will simply note that as a result of their disobedience:

A. Aaron dies and Moses is not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Which is unthinkable – like a marathon runner who has led the race from the beginning, collapsing 20 yards from the finish line.

XIV. So, what is going on? Why did I pick this passage? If your response is anything like mine, you are thinking, “Are you kidding me? What did they do wrong? They did exactly what they did 38 years ago. They certainly did not do anything worthy of the punishment they got.

A. And you feel like saying, “Lord, these are the kind of crazy Old Testament passages that give you and the Old Testament a bad reputation.

- XV. So, what are we missing? Several things:
- A. For starters, Moses and Aaron were not told to speak to the people. They were told to speak to the rock. But Moses spoke to the people. In fact, he gives them a lecture. He calls them rebels a few times. And this appears to be a bad move, because three of the next five times God speaks to Moses, God calls Moses a rebel.
 - B. Secondly, after Moses spoke to the people, he hit the rock. God did not say “hit the rock,” He said, “Speak to it.”
- XVI. Now, a casual reading might suggest:
- A. That Moses still had some anger management issues. He had them earlier – way back when he killed the Egyptian Task master. I read some commentaries suggesting this – that talk about our need to deal with our besetting sin. But that is not what the text says. What God says to them – verse 12 – is not, “Because you lost your temper. Because you let the people’s whining get to you, you are in trouble.” What God says is, “because you did not believe me.” Because you did not trust.
 - B. Which suggests that you build a case about the importance of obedience – even in little things. And I read some sermons suggesting that this is the message.
 - C. I’ve also read some suggest that the problem here is that Moses and Aaron appear to take credit for getting the water out of the rock – which makes him look like a priest in the pagan religions around there.
- XVII. No. Sure, there is an opportunity to reflect on all of that. There is some value in these answers. But they miss the main point. This passage is very much like God telling Abraham to tie up Isaac and sacrifice him. It only makes sense once we realize that this event is pointing to Christ.
- A. That passage is designed to help us realize how unthinkable it is that God would tie up his son and sacrifice him. The Abraham and Isaac passage doesn’t make sense until we see what it is saying about Christ.
- XVIII. And the same thing is true here. This passage doesn’t make sense until you realize, the rock that Moses hit is foreshadowing Jesus.
- A. The rock that provides life-giving (living) water is pointing to Jesus.
 - B. The rock that brings them salvation is pointing to Jesus.
 - C. The rock that was struck once for our sins – back in Exodus 17 - but should not be struck again, just appealed to – this rock is Christ.
- XIX. To be clear, the claim is, it’s a real rock, but it is also a foreshadowing of Christ.
- XX. Where did I get this crazy idea? I am pretty sure some of you are thinking, “Woodruff, you are always finding things I didn’t see, but this is a bridge too far. There is no way this is Christ. There is no way I am to be expected to get that this is Christ. What leads you to this crazy idea.

XXI. What leads me to say this? I Corinthians 10:1. In that letter, Paul writes: **For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.**

XXII. I do not think we could be expected to understand that the rock was Christ unless it was pointed out. I do not think we could be expected to see that Jesus was the new Jacob's ladder, or the new and better temple, or the new and better Jonah unless it was point out. But it is pointed out. The book is woven together in the most amazing way.

XXIII. Now, there are some other life lessons to be gleaned from Numbers 20 and I Corinthians 10. But my goal today is not really about unpacking them. My goal is to say:

A. You can have hope. You can have Advent hope. You can have confidence in the claims of Christ. And some of you really need some hope right now. Life is hard. What becomes clear as we push on the Bible is that it is not simply a collection of inspirational stories and morality tales. It is the unfolding story of God's amazing love for you and the lengths he has gone to to rescue you.

B. And as a side note, you can be assured that Christ is not an afterthought to the story. The whole thing points to him. And it points to him in ways that are amazing.

XXIV. The story has always been about Him. At Advent we celebrate his arrival. It's not the most amazing thing, but it's close.

XXV. Campus Pastors benediction: Numbers 6:24-26

¹ See Mt. 2:13-15; 5:17; Hos. 11:1

² See chapter six in Edmund Clowney's *The Unfolding Mystery*. P&R, 1988.