

Faith in Times of Uncertainty

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the English language, words like and, for, but, or, yet – these are called conjunctions. These are the little words that link together ideas or that takes us from one idea to another thought. I am happy to inform you that you did well on your interview, but we are giving the job to someone else. Well that is a turn from apparently good news to bad news after all; then again, there were many applicants for the job, but we are giving the position to you. Well, in the Bible there are many key texts where that little conjunction turns everything toward a new, hope-filled direction. Today, we begin with a little known but powerful text from 2 Chronicles in the Old Testament. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, we are starting a new series, as we just mentioned, and we are calling it the bad news/good news texts of the Bible. The verses where that conjunction *but* pivots our hearts from one thing – usually an unhappy truth – to something happier, although we will have at least one example in this series of a text that goes the other way; but, it is an interesting way to approach some of the key texts of scripture.

DAVE BAST

Well, I really do think it is; and a significant way to do personal bible study, or any other kind, for that matter. If you are a preacher or a bible study leader, it is so important to pay attention to the small words in a given passage; especially in a verse or a text; because the small words will often unearth the main point that is being expressed; or they will point toward it; and nowhere is that better illustrated than in this use of the conjunction *but*, which implies, as you said, a hinge or a pivot point turning us from bad news to good news or the other way around.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and not surprisingly, as we will see, Dave, in this series this is going to have a great connection to our everyday lives. All of these texts are going to connect to us because we find ourselves in circumstances like that – like the ones we are going to see – including the one that we are going to begin with on this program; probably one of the lesser known books of the Bible: 2 Chronicles; and just to remind our listeners and ourselves we will do a little background here on the Old Testament, and where in the Old Testament these books of 1 and 2 Chronicles come.

DAVE BAST

Right; we often read the stories in 1 and 2 Samuel. Those are the stories of King Saul and King David and King Solomon after him, and they edge out into 1 and 2 Kings, the so-called history books of the Bible. Many people tend to get bogged down the further the story goes because one of the great watershed moments of the Old Testament is the division of the kingdom, as it is called. When Solomon died, he bequeathed the kingdom of Israel to his son, Rehoboam, but there was a rebel leader in the northern part of the country called Jeroboam; so, you have Rehoboam, the son of Solomon versus Jeroboam, the rebellion leader, and that

caused the whole country to split; to divide into two between the northern tribes – ten of them, which formed the nation of Israel – and then the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin, which was called Judah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. So, after Solomon you do not have a united Israel anymore – you had that with David and Solomon, but not anymore. Now we have Israel to the north – capitol city: Samaria; Judah to the south – capitol city still in Jerusalem; and eventually, the northern kingdom, Israel, gets wiped out by the Assyrians; and they never really return, per se. The Assyrians pretty well wipe them out, cart them away...

DAVE BAST

Those are the so-called lost tribes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they never really returned; whereas, Judah – about 40 or 50 years later – Judah also gets sacked by Babylon, but they and the king get carried off into exile for 70 years; but eventually, they get set free and a remnant returns to Israel, and those are the stories of Nehemiah and Ezra rebuilding the walls, rebuilding the Temple; so, the southern kingdom of Judah is going to come back eventually, but we just need to remember that we have these two kingdoms, and the story we are looking at from Chronicles – and 1 and 2 Chronicles are very similar to 1 and 2 Kings...

DAVE BAST

Yes, they cover much of the same ground, actually, and it kind of makes you wonder why the duplication; but, there is a different slant in Chronicles from Kings, and they carry the story through a little bit more comprehensively maybe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And one thing we know from both Kings and Chronicles is that, of course, after Solomon, and then after the kingdom splits with Rehoboam and Jeroboam, there are a lot of kings, and if you want to get good at winning bible trivia, then you memorize all of those kings; but, we will just focus on one king here. Now, this was in the southern kingdom of Judah; we are in 2 Chronicles 20 on this program, and it is the man with the somewhat familiar name because it is an unusual name: Jehoshaphat; and one thing we learn about Jehoshaphat very early on is that he is one of Judah's good kings. They had a lot of bad kings who forgot about the Law; forgot about Yahweh, the true God of Israel; they worshiped the Baals; they consulted sorcerers; there were a lot of bad kings in both Israel and Judah – we are in Judah – but not Jehoshaphat – he was a good one.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but despite the fact that he more or less lived obediently to the Lord – and incidentally, that is probably the biggest difference between Judah and Israel – Israel had no king whatsoever, from beginning to end, who was described as being faithful to God – the God of Israel. In fact, they had some of the worst ones; most notably, Ahab.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, and Jezebel...

DAVE BAST

Jezebel, his wife, who became kind of a byword for idolatry; but Judah periodically had faithful descendants of David, and the promise of God to David ran through the line of Judah; so, Judah is going to be where our attention is fixed; but interestingly, that did not mean that they experienced blessing all the time, or that they never ran into trouble, or never lost to their enemies because God was on their side. On the contrary, Judah got kicked around regularly; got kicked around by Israel; got kicked around by its neighbors, whom it once had ruled in the glory days of David and Solomon; and ultimately, as you said, Scott, would be destroyed by Babylon.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, by the time we get to 2 Chronicles 20, we are into Jehoshaphat's reign, but indeed, there is trouble. Moab and Ammon, two neighbors, have got their armies on the border and they are in trouble, and so we hear this from 2 Chronicles 20:

¹After this, the Moabites and Ammonites, with some of the other Meunites, they came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. ²Some of the people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, for the other side of the Dead Sea." ³Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to enquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. ⁴The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

DAVE BAST

⁵Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, at the Temple of the Lord, in front of the new courtyard, ⁶and he said, "Lord, the God of our ancestors; are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. ¹⁰But now here are men from Ammon and Moab, and Mount Seir; Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us – and here it comes – we do not know what to do, *but* our eyes are on you."

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, there we have it – a significant statement of faith – everything that their physical eyes could show them looked very, very bad. You looked at the borders: Army here, army there; they are coming in; they have their spears; it looks really, really bad; and in his prayer, King Jehoshaphat is pretty honest. He says: Hey, look, God; we do not know what to do. We have not a clue in the world what to do. We are stuck – *but* – our eyes are on you, O God.

DAVE BAST

Isn't that a great thought? And isn't that an experience that you have known and I certainly have as well. This is something that we can really take out of this ancient story; people whose names we can hardly pronounce – they seem so foreign – but we find they are just like us; they are in that tight spot; we do not know what to do, *but* our eyes are on you, O God. Let's talk a little bit more about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, we are in this new series: Bad news/good news, or sometimes good news/bad news texts of the Bible, and today we are in 2 Chronicles 20, where we just saw that Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah are between the devil and the deep blue sea; everything they can see with their eyes looks very, very grim, and very, very bad; this cannot possibly turn out well for Judah; and so, we just read that text, where Jehoshaphat says: Look, we do not know what to do; *but*, our eyes are on you, O God.

DAVE BAST

And that is the little word that we want to pay attention to because it signals a U-turn in the thought, and there are a number of these wonderful texts where that happens. It is a turn from hopelessness and helplessness – look, we are facing this overwhelming enemy; we are absolutely at wit's end, as the saying goes; or at the end of our rope – interesting how we use those kinds of expressions – *but*, we are looking to you, God. So, that is the big turn.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and it reminds me – and it might remind others, too – of a little bit more familiar text from 2 Kings 6, and this is when the servant of Elisha gets up one morning, and he too looks out the front window, kind of yawning, waking up, and there is an army surrounding them. Let me just read this really quick from 2 Kings 6, beginning of the 15th verse:

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, no, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. ¹⁶“Do not be afraid,” Elisha answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see,” and then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Great story.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is a great story: Open his eyes, Lord. You know, in our own experience, the enemy’s armies can seem to be overwhelming as they confront us; and it might be the stack of unpaid bills on your desk, and you compare that to what is in your bank account and it does not measure up, or it could be the diagnosis you have received at the doctor’s office – again, you have exhausted your resources; you do not know what to do or where to turn.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; or sometimes you look at your family – maybe your immediate family, maybe your extended family – and you just see a whole bunch of relationships that have gone sour. Sometimes this comes into focus for people around Thanksgiving or Christmas, but it can come anytime. You look at those bills, you look at the diagnosis and the lab report, you look at pictures of your kids on the fireplace mantel, and you realize that things are not as good as they should be; and we do often turn to God and say, “I do not know what to do – I do not know what to do, O God; but I am turning my eyes on you. Help me.”

DAVE BAST

Our tendency as human beings, I think for most of us, is to try to problem-solve on our own. Think of another phrase we sometimes use, “Don’t just stand there, do something. Do something!” And we are not arguing for being completely passive; for not just sitting back and saying, “Well, God; why don’t you take over here?” But what we are saying, I think, is there are times and circumstances where no matter what we do, it is not going to be enough; and it is then that we need to look for a resource that the world might laugh at or scoff at – you know, God? What is God?

When you were reading that story about Elisha and the enemy army and he prays for his servant’s eyes to be opened to see the chariots, it reminded me of a well-known quip from World War II. When Germany was locked in the war against the Allies, including Russia, and somebody mentioned to Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, about the Pope, and Stalin quipped: How many divisions does the Pope have? How big is his army? As if he say it means nothing. But really, ultimately, it is the spiritual side of the equation that matters the most.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and that is, again, something that we know from our own lives, that there really are those moments when we admit: I cannot fix this. I cannot repair this. Sometimes when your children are small and they skin their knee, you can kiss the booboo; you can take them in your arms and you hug them; but as my kids have gotten older – and you, no doubt, have experienced this, Dave, because I think most parents do – problems get more complicated, and you cannot fix things anymore. Sometimes when they are hurting, you do not know what to say; and that is true of a lot of life; but here is Jehoshaphat, in front of all of Israel, saying: That is us. Our back is to the wall. We are not strong enough to defeat Moab and Ammon, and there are a few other glom-a-ron armies, too, who just kind of come to the party. We are not strong enough; so, our eyes are on you. That is what we do, and we should be honest enough in our lives that when we do this – when we pray – when we say to God: Look, I am looking to you to help me out; to fix this relationship; to get these bills paid; to figure out what I am supposed to do after a long period of unemployment – that does not mean

it is going to come instantly. We do rely on God; we look to God; we admit our own weakness; but, we do not want to be too simplistic here and say: If you do that, somebody will stop by with a thousand dollars within the hour, or your kids will call you the next day and it will all be hunky-dory; no, but there is great comfort and great strength, and a great re-orientation that comes for us as believers when we do say: Look, my eyes are on you, O God. Help me. Stand with me, at least. And maybe we find some courage just from that that keeps us from being paralyzed by grief or fear or disorientation.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think that is true. I sometimes talk about Sunday school endings to stories; very simple: Oh, you prayed, and look what God did; this miracle, and now you are happy all the day. Life is not like that, but what does happen, I think, when we turn our eyes to him, is that we find the deeper truth that however he may deliver us, or perhaps not deliver us immediately, his presence is with us, and we discover what the Apostle Paul said – or what was said to the Apostle Paul when he prayed to the Lord: My grace is sufficient for you. I am enough for you; and the fact that I will be with you and sustain you – somehow – again, to quote the Apostle – the peace that passes understanding – you cannot really explain this because Jehoshaphat is still in the situation after he has prayed; he has not experienced deliverance at that point; and yet, somehow, it is enough to know that God has come and is sustaining him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some of our listeners maybe saw a movie that came out late in 2014, but into wider release in early 2015, the movie *Selma*; and there is a scene in the movie – I do not know if historically it actually happened – it probably did – but there is a scene in the movie when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is paralyzed with some fear, and the mission for civil rights is not looking good, and so late one night he calls up the famous singer, Mahalia Jackson, and says to her on the phone: I need a word from God, and she sings the song: *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*, to him over the phone. It did not solve all of Dr. King's problems; it did not mean more people were not going to get killed; but hearing, he turned his eyes on the Lord: Precious Lord, take my hand, [lead me on], help me stand – it helped. It gave strength. That is what happens to us when, indeed, like Jehoshaphat, we turn our eyes to God. It does not solve everything, necessarily – it might – but it gives us strength to stand.

DAVE BAST

Well, in just a moment we are going to loop back to 2 Chronicles Chapter 20, and let's take a look at how Jehoshaphat's story turned out.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and our bad news/good news text series. We have been looking, Dave, at 2 Chronicles 20, and we saw that King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah had their backs to the wall. At least two, maybe two-and-a-half armies were threatening them. Jehoshaphat had said in the key verse we read earlier: O, God; we do not know what to do; but, our eyes are upon you. Now, we want to find out what happened.

DAVE BAST

Well, right after he prayed, this is what happened:

¹⁴Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, the son of Zachariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendent of Asaph; and he stood in the assembly. ¹⁵He said, "Listen, King Jehoshaphat, and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem, this is what the Lord says to you, 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours, but God's.' ^{17b}Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged; go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is just what happened, too; indeed, in this case, God did come through. Judah was victorious after all. God gave them the victory, but there is something interesting in 2 Chronicles 20:21 that happened even

before that victory came; before Jehoshaphat or anybody could really be sure that the word of prophecy they just heard was true, and here it is from the 21st verse of 2 Chronicles 20:

²¹After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord, and to praise him for the spender of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, and they were saying: Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.” And that is a lovely verse. They are saying that the victory has not been given yet, and until it has, you do not know; but, God is great; God is holy; and his love endures forever; and they sang praises to God even before victory was won, when things still... you did not know; but turning their eyes to God gave them enough confidence to go on, which is what happens in our lives.

DAVE BAST

That is what believers do, though; those who have really genuinely experienced the presence of the Lord or heard a word from him, as happened with Jehoshaphat and the people, the Lord gave them a particular, specific word through this prophet that he inspired. When you hear from God like that and you know deep down that he really is with you, you can worship and praise him even before the deliverance comes. You do not have to wait until afterwards.

I have been thinking all through this story of another verse from the New Testament, from the end of 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul says that we do not lose heart, even though our outer nature may be passing away, or wasting away; inwardly we are being renewed day by day because we do not look at the things that are seen; for those things are transient – they are passing away – but, another – there is that word again...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Another conjunction...

DAVE BAST

But we look to the things that are unseen; that are eternal; the things of God. That is really what is going to root us in reality; not just the world around us, the things that we see that are passing away – including us; but, the reality of the eternal God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, and who sustains us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And one other thing that this reminds us of is that when we turn our eyes upon God, one of the things that happens – again, we saw this just in the that brief, little 21st verse we just read – one of the things that happens is it reminds us of who God is. We can lose sight of even that when you are down, when you are tired, when you are depressed, when the odds seem stacked against you, we actually can forget a little bit about what a great God we serve. So, here is Jehoshaphat appointing these people to sing, even before the victory is won, for the splendor of his holiness – what a great thing – and then to give thanks, for his love endures forever. The word love there in the Hebrew is the word *chesed*, and that is a very key word because it comes up all through the Old Testament, particularly in the book of the Psalms, and it is the word – it is very hard to translate – sometimes it is called love, but sometimes in the older versions, loving-kindness – it really, though...

DAVE BAST

Steadfast love in many of the newer...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Steadfast love; it is such a rich word that we cannot find one English word to nail it; but really, it is the same word that in the New Testament gets translated as grace; that we are saved by grace. So, why does turning our eyes upon God help us when our back is to the wall and all else is failing us? Because one of the things we remember is that he is a font of grace; that God is overflowing with grace; he always has grace more abundant to meet all of our needs; to forgive all of our sins; this is a great God whom we serve; and when you remind yourself of that, as Jehoshaphat and the people did, then even when you are still in the throes of suffering, it somehow helps to know: Oh, this is who is on our side.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We cannot ultimately lose.

DAVE BAST

That idea of steadfast love, or sometimes it is also called God's covenant love, meaning the love that stems from his commitment to us – his promise; and this is a God who never changes, who never wavers. So, when it seems like things are against us, like we are in a dead end with no escape, we are reminded by looking to God, he does not waver; he does not change; he does not fail; he does not extend a commitment to us and then take it back again. That is not his character. His love is constant and steadfast. It is always there. So, that is what we are encouraged to do when we look at him. It is not just sort of vaguely look up at the sky and think indistinct thoughts; it is to remember his commitment to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we, of course, read this now – this 2 Chronicles 20 story – through New Testament eyes, and we know that the ultimate expression of that *chesed* – that loving-kindness – that steadfast love – that grace of God – is Jesus, who came down into our sufferings to bring us out.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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