

Faith Questions We All Ask

SCOTT HOEZEE

Questions are a natural part of our faith. As we seek to understand scripture, as we work out the implication of faith in our lives. As circumstances challenge our understanding, it is natural to ask questions, to clarify and to seek understanding. We are glad that you regularly share your questions with us via e-mail and social media. It keeps us digging into scripture together to lay a solid foundation of faith for our lives. Today, let's discuss questions you have asked *Groundwork* recently about the Bible, assurance of faith, and where we turn for hope when life is not at all what we expected. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *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, as we just said in the introduction, this is one of two or three programs we do per year where the content of the program has been very much determined by our listeners, because they have e-mailed us or Facebooked us or sent us regular mail questions that they have maybe thought of while listening to *Groundwork* this year, or questions we have not tackled specifically recently on *Groundwork*. So, that is what we are going to dedicate this program to.

DAVE BAST

Right; or even just regular listeners who have circumstances in their lives that prompt them to wonder or struggle or ask, and so they get in touch with us. On every *Groundwork* program, we invite those listener comments and questions, so it would be quite remiss if we never addressed them or never attempted to answer them.

So, as you said, Scott, that is what we are going to do today; and we are going to begin with a rather big question about the Bible overall. A person named Kay writes: Why is the Old Testament so important, since the New Testament replaces it with the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Savior? I am confused.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a good question. If you pay really close attention to *Groundwork*, the way our producer does, you know that we try to balance out Old Testament programs and New Testament programs. So, we have done...in recent times we have done a series on the Gospel of Mark, we have very recently done one on John, but we have also done Ezra and Nehemiah. We have done Psalms. We have done stories out of Genesis. So, we always try to get a balance of Old Testament and New Testament; and Kay's question is: Well, why do we need that when the gospel is what reveals Jesus to us? This is a question the Church has wrestled with for a long time.

DAVE BAST

Yes; as you point out, it is a very ancient question. In fact, it goes all the way back at least to the 2nd Century, where a Christian teacher named Marcion suggested that we just get rid of the Old Testament because it is not worthy of belief for Christians. You know, it has a more violent God, it seems. It is all about Israel and the Jewish people. We even properly refer to it as the Hebrew Scriptures, so maybe that is for them, and in the New Testament, where God seems to be more loving and more gracious and it is all about Jesus, we could just split and focus only on the New Testament. So, this is an ancient issue, and the Church has

altogether and always come down on the side of no, no; the whole Bible belongs together—Old and New are one message, really, essentially one message about who God is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; indeed, the early Church went so far as to declare Marcionism...the teaching of Marcion...as heresy, in part not just because he rejected the Old Testament...what we call the Hebrew Scriptures...but even suggested it must be a completely different God. The God [of] Yahweh is not the Father of Jesus; so therefore, that was rejected as actually heresy.

Kay's question also touches on something else, which has been discussed in Church history for a long time: Does the New Testament *replace* the Old Testament? There has been a temptation in Church history for something called *supersessionism*, which is to say Israel of old isn't even important. The Church completely supersedes that...the Church displaces that...so Israel isn't even important; but you know, Dave, the New Testament itself says that that is not right; and in fact, the writers...and you can see this in all of the gospels...but it is very, very clear in places, particularly Matthew, who does more with Jesus *fulfilling* the Old Testament than probably the other three gospel writers; but the Church is presented as not a replacement for ancient Israel, but as its next stage. It is the new Israel. Jesus was in his own self the new Israel, which you can see in the temptation stories, like in Matthew, when Jesus resists the three temptations of the devil in the wilderness, he quotes Deuteronomy to refute the devil all three times, which is Matthew's way of saying: Where Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus—the new Israel—succeeds, and he is going to use Deuteronomy, which Israel had, too, to do it. So, there is that, that Jesus is the Son of David...he is in the line of David, he is the fulfillment of what was promised to David all the way back in 2 Samuel 7, right? So, there is that continuity.

There is also another thing, Dave, that, you know, the New Testament often refers to the scriptures and how they are God breathed...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But they were not referring to what they were writing...

DAVE BAST

Or inspired, we usually say, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But they meant the Old Testament.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is all inspired by God. You know, maybe even a more basic point, as you said, referring to Jesus himself: The Old Testament was Jesus' Bible...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he loved it. He quoted from it, and he said famously in Matthew Chapter 5: (verses 17, 18 paraphrased) I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law; and none of it will pass away until it has all been fulfilled. So, if you want to ask as a Christian: Why should we care about the Old Testament? The simplest answer to me is because Jesus did. It was his Bible, and we want to be like him, we want to read it as he did; but I think we can go one step further, and you also alluded to this, Scott. The Old Testament is full of Christ. We mustn't look at these two different books and say: Well, the Old Testament, that is just about the Jewish people and their history and the kings and all that. The New Testament is all about Jesus. No; in Jesus' own mind, the Old Testament was also about him. The Prophets were full of information and predictions of his

coming and of his ministry. In fact, he says in one remarkable place in John Chapter 5...near the end of John Chapter 5: (verse 46) Moses wrote about me; and in Luke 24, after the resurrection, almost the last thing Luke says is that Jesus opened the minds of his disciples and showed them all that the Prophets and the Law had taught about him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and here is Luke 24:27. On the road to Emmaus, he meets this couple who are so sad that Jesus died, and he says: (verse 25) Oh, foolish ones, slow of heart; you need to believe all that the prophets have spoken. (And then verse 27): And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

In other words, Jesus himself said: The Old Testament points to me.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am the fulfillment of everything in those scriptures. So, we not only *need* the Old Testament, we need it to understand Jesus properly.

DAVE BAST

So, that phrase...that wonderful phrase...beginning with Moses and the Prophets...you could say Moses begins with Genesis; the Prophets end with Malachi. Everything from Genesis to Malachi points forward to Christ, and we read the whole thing in the richness of the revelation it gives us of God's eternal purposes in sending Christ into the world to be the Savior of his Old Testament saints and his New Testament saints both.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that means as Christians we are unabashedly, unashamedly going to read the Old Testament different than our Jewish brothers and sisters. As my colleague at Calvin, Mary Hulst, often says: If a Christian preacher preaches a sermon from the Old Testament that would go over just fine in your average synagogue, then it is not a good Christian sermon because we see Christ hidden in the Old Testament. We see the promises that are going to be fulfilled that will find their "yes" in Christ. That is all in there.

So, yes, to Kay's question, we definitely need the Old Testament. We really cannot make sense of Jesus without it; and anyway, the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, finally, Dave, narrates one story...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One sacred drama of redemption, and...you know, you need the beginning of a story to understand it...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we don't want to lose that final background to the gospels.

DAVE BAST

And it is one God...one and the same God...not a God of wrath in the Old Testament and a God of grace in the New; but a God who is both gracious, loving, and holy and righteous from beginning to end, and most fully revealed in the face of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Well, that was a great question. We are about to go on to some more questions that have to do more with personal spiritual struggle and the struggles of faith, and we will turn to that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this is a listener question program. We received your questions that you have e-mailed and Facebooked and sent by mail to *Groundwork* in the past year. We just had a question from a listener named Kay who wondered why we still need the Old Testament when Jesus is revealed in the New Testament. We talked about that; but now, we want to talk about some questions which...and we are recording this near the very end of the year 2020, which was not a year anybody in the world expected with the pandemic of the coronavirus and COVID-19 disease, with some racial unrest, and major political movements in the US and elsewhere. This has been a year, Dave, that has thrown us off kilter.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and so we have a listener who sent an e-mail...we are withholding the name...but it begins LOL please; and LOL is tech shorthand for laugh out loud, and I don't think she means it in a ha-ha, funny sense...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

Or he. It is a kind of poignant sort of laugh because the questioner goes on to say: If God honestly loves me, I would not feel so alone, and everything would not be falling apart.

Boy, that's a touching one, and I think it is one most of us can identify with at different times in our lives. You know, Scott, a number of years ago I wrote a little book about the prophecy of Habakkuk; and you know, I am not going to claim it was a great book or anything, but I really liked the title I came up with. I called it: *Why Doesn't God Act More Like God?* Because that is exactly the kind of question Habakkuk has. The question this listener has: If God were *really* in control...if he *really* cared about me...if he *really* loved me...my life wouldn't be so painful...it wouldn't be such a mess; and that is a question that is really asked again and again in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we could pair up with that some questions that have come in through our Facebook account. One listener wrote: Where is God? Another listener wrote: Why has God abandoned me? These are gut-wrenching questions, and they come from people who are hurting, that much we can see very, very plainly; but I think one thing we want to point out initially, Dave, in tackling these questions...and of course, let's just admit that in the next, you know, five or six minutes of this segment, we are not going to be able to answer...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Definitively these questions. One thing I think we need to point out, because I think this can be somewhat comforting is that...you know what? You know where else you find these questions? Not just on our *Groundwork* Facebook page. They are right in the Bible...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are in the Psalms...they are in the psalms of lament, which, as we have noted before on *Groundwork* as we have talked about lament in other programs, fully one-third...almost fifty of the one hundred fifty psalms...are in the mode of lament. It is in lament where these exact questions get asked. So, the point on

that, Dave, believers ask these kinds of questions...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is not the question of an unbeliever. This is not a sign of weak faith, but strong faith...robust faith. Believers pray this way.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; here is a great example, one of the best examples from the Psalms: Psalm 13 is a psalm of lament, which begins: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ⁴Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God. Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. (And then this note of hope at the end.) ⁶I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

So, yes; that great question: How long? Where is God? Why have you hidden your face? In fact, Martin Luther, who felt this very keenly himself in his own life, would talk about the "hidden God," the God who seems to hide his face from us, the God who doesn't seem to be there. That is what these friends of ours are expressing in their messages, and that is what we sometimes feel as well; and we don't have a clear-cut answer, why does God behave that way?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; in fact, there is a Latin phrase that has been applied to various scripture passages: *Deus absconditus*—the hidden God...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Why would God hide? Why do you hide your face from me, O God? That is from another psalm of lament. So, that is the first thing to notice. Psalm 13...just that psalm alone, Dave...tells these listeners who have sent these questions that these are questions that come from faith. They are not a sign of no faith. If you didn't have faith, you wouldn't even bother to ask these questions. We don't fully understand why, but here is one thing that we do know, Dave. The irony of the psalms of lament, as we have noted in the past, is that they lament God's absence to God's face, right? These are still prayers directed *to* God. It is how long will *you* abandon me? So, we are talking to God, we cannot see God, we are having a hard time locating God or seeing God active; and yet, believers still yell these complaints to God. We are...even the psalms of lament acknowledge that we are always in God's presence. Whether we can see God very well or not, we are in God's presence, and with the exception of just one psalm, which is Psalm 88, all of the psalms of lament do what Psalm 13 did, Dave, in what you just read; they turn a corner, either to say that is how I prayed for a long time: where are you, God? But then he came through for me and I am rejoicing; or they say: but I know he is going to come through for me, and I will rejoice because he will deal bountifully with me, as the last verse of Psalm 13 says. So, there is always that turn back towards some hope, but that is at least partly premised on the very idea that we know that even when we lament, we are lamenting to God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and I think the struggle for all of us...I know it is for me when I am feeling like this...is to try to distinguish between my feelings and my faith in what I believe to be objectively true—true about God; and I believe it primarily because God's Word says it, because he has proved it in Jesus Christ, and specifically in raising Jesus from the dead; and don't forget, Jesus himself asked similar questions on the cross...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he quotes a psalm of lament.

DAVE BAST

Yes: Where are you, God? Why have you forsaken me? So, I just try to hang onto that, that that is true. That is who God is, and whether I feel it or not, he is going to eventually prove himself to be such in my life, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, bound up with all of this, Dave, are some of the deepest and most painful and most profound questions that relate to what is often called the problem of evil. Why doesn't God head off the pandemic? Why doesn't God prevent hurricanes and earthquakes? Why doesn't God prevent drunk drivers who run over children and kill them? And we cannot finally answer those questions. We did a whole series on the book of Job here on *Groundwork* a while back. We cannot finally know all ends and all the ways of God, but we do maintain our belief that nothing can dethrone God—nothing can displace God—and that is our hope. Speaking of hope, in just a moment, we want to talk directly about that...about how we find hope and how we maintain hope, even in some of the most difficult of times. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and this listener question program; we have asked people in an e-mail survey recently that we send out to our subscribers...many of you receive an e-mail every week when a new *Groundwork* program appears online. If you would like to receive that, go to groundworkonline.com. You can sign up to get that e-mail...but we sent a survey out: What is the most pressing question or issue in your faith life right now? And not surprisingly, Dave, a lot of the responses in 2020 were all about the pandemic...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Is the world going to make it through the coronavirus? Not being able to attend our church for fear of the virus has caused disunity in our congregations; how do we deal with that? How do we find hope? How do we find God's presence in the fight for social justice, as well as the fight against the pandemic? I know God is in control, but I am hurting for those who don't know him and cannot find those answers in this difficult, difficult time. So, no surprise that those are some of the most pressing issues people that are talking about.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we have just been talking about those who kind of feel the absence of God...wonder how God could love them when their life is falling apart; and incidentally, we do have a pretty short, pithy definition that proves God's love from Romans 5:8: God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. If you are wondering about that, just hang onto that fact; Christ died for you. But you know, yes, God is on the throne; God is in control; that is the message of the whole book of Revelation. We have often looked at those wonderful pictures from Revelation, where despite all the chaos and turmoil and persecution, really, of the late 1st Century Christian world, where the Roman Empire was becoming increasingly opposed to the gospel, John had this vision of heaven where God is reigning, and the Lamb is there beside him. We can hold onto that even in the midst of turmoil because it is true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I also think it is important to point out, Dave, when we ask where God is in the midst of a pandemic like coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease it causes, one of the answers to the question where is God is maybe

God is supposed to be seen in us. You know, I have been co-teaching a New Testament course on the gospels recently, and my colleague, Mariano Avila, has pointed out to the students that in the time before Jesus, and not long after the life and ministry of Jesus, there were pandemics in the Roman Empire—there was disease that killed many, many, many, many people; but in one of the ones that came after the founding of the Church, historians like Eusebius tell us a lot of people fled. They just got out of town, but Christians stayed...Christians ministered...Christians reached out. So, where was God in that pandemic? It was in those individual believers who rushed *toward* the trouble to try to help in Jesus' name.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and what a witness that can be if in the midst of what our culture, our society has been experiencing, we could become voices of reason, agents of peace...of reconciliation, beacons of hope, even; caring people who reached out and tried to help those who were afflicted in some way. You know, there are a hundred different ways you can be a good neighbor. You can be the presence of Christ—the hands and feet of Jesus in these times. It might just be helping someone who cannot get out or is afraid to get out, or getting groceries for somebody. Use your imagination...use your creativity, and we can be the presence of God and the light of hope in other peoples' lives. What a wonderful idea that is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed; and that can help others see God. I am reminded of Romans 12, which in the Bible I am looking at has a subtitle of this section: The marks of the true Christian; and Paul says: Let love be genuine; but then of course, he says in Romans 12:15: Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. And that is what we are called to do. Or we think of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. Jesus said: When you reach out to the hungry (and so many are hungry today), when you reach out to the lonely, to those who don't have enough clothing, you are basically ministering to me. I am those people...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am those people, and you are to see me that way.

DAVE BAST

Here is another thought from scripture: If you are really wondering and you are feeling fearful, read the end of Romans Chapter 8, where the Apostle addresses many of our common fears, afraid that we might face condemnation or opposition or that we might face loss. The Apostle says in this great series of rhetorical questions: ³²[Look,] he who did not spare his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not also, with him, give us all things?

So, he has already given us Jesus. Do you think he is going to withhold, finally, anything from you that you need or want or desire for your joy? So, hang on to that...hang on to Romans 8:28: In all things God is working for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose; and that is gospel truth, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast. Join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you. Tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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