

Is the Bible True?

DAVE BAST

We live in a world where knowledge is power. The amount that we know about science, about human nature, really about everything, is increasing daily; but for every cause, there is an effect; for every action, there is a consequence. So how do we navigate these waters? Where do we find answers?

BOB HEERSPINK

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, Henri Nouwen, the Catholic priest and devotional writer, once told a parable that illustrates the difference between knowledge and wisdom. He said there were four brothers in India, and they split up and went their separate ways, each to discover true knowledge; and when they gathered back, they said: We have discovered some amazing things. The one said: If I have a piece of bone, I can put flesh on the bone. The second said: I can put skin and hair on that flesh. The third said: I can add limbs; and the four said: I can bring what you have created to life; and so they went into the jungle to find a bone on which to practice; and they did find a bone of a lion, but they didn't know it was a lion.

DAVE BAST

Oh, I can see where this is going.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; they all performed their deep wisdom, and they brought this creature to life, and it turned on them, it destroyed them, and it crept into the jungle. Now, that story really isn't about mere wisdom. It is really helping us understand the difference between wisdom and knowledge.

DAVE BAST

Yes; can you say: Oops. We talk about the law of unintended consequences. I mean, it just seems to affect human behavior and human life in society. We come up with something new; we invent something; we develop a drug; and it does maybe what we hoped it would do, but then it does some other things as well that we didn't want.

BOB HEERSPINK

We are good at discovering new things. In fact, knowledge is growing – it is doubling every seven years; but how to handle knowledge, that is something different.

DAVE BAST

Yes. Sometimes the knowledge that we have that seems so promising and beneficial threatens to obliterate us. I mean, just to take the most obvious example, we discover how to split the atom; and the result? Well, now millions could be killed instead of just thousands, by some evil person or some terrible act; and yes, it is

nice, clean energy, theoretically; but oh, what are you going to do with all of that radioactive waste? How are you going to store that?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; well, General Omar Bradley once, surveying the whole nuclear threat, said: We are technological giants, but we are moral pigmies.

DAVE BAST

Yes; now, there is the issue, because wisdom is all about knowing how to live, not just how to do something; but what you should be doing – how to treat others – how to order your life in a way that is healthy and life-affirming... So, the question is, where do we get it? Where do we get wisdom? You know, that is a thing that the Bible itself addresses. It claims that we can find the answer, first of all, through knowing God. A famous verse from Proverbs, and it occurs elsewhere in scripture: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So wisdom comes from a relationship with God, but it also grows through knowing his word, the Bible.

BOB HEERSPINK

The Bible is at the core of true wisdom, and that is really something that our society doesn't always recognize. People look at the Bible...maybe they have a King James Version on the shelf. It seems archaic. They look at this book with stories that go back thousands of years, and they say: Why should it speak to today? How does it speak to today?

DAVE BAST

Yes; in a world of space travel and cloning, the Internet...does this 2,000-year-old book really have answers?

BOB HEERSPINK

And yet, Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:15 that the scriptures are able to give us real wisdom; they are able to make us wise, even unto salvation.

DAVE BAST

So, the Bible claims to be the source of wisdom, not only for our lives, but even for salvation through Christ, but how do we know it is true? That is the big question. Let's pause first, though, before we take that up and talk about how you can join us in this conversation through our website.

BOB HEERSPINK

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures. There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with our lives.

We would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the topics we are going to talk about is the problem of evil. Is it possible to answer the problem of evil? How do we as Christians reconcile a good God with all the evil we see in the world? Share your thoughts on these upcoming questions at groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Okay, Bob, let's get back to the topic at hand. We are talking about knowledge and wisdom and the difference between the two; about how gaining knowledge is a highly respected goal in our world, but we also need wisdom to know what to do with that knowledge once we have it; and as Christians, we believe the Bible has the answer, that it is the source of the wisdom we need; but why do we believe that and how do we know it is true?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; because we are talking about the Bible as the source of wisdom in a world which has become pluralistic. I mean, we know about other religions. They have their holy books. They all claim to have some revelation from God. They cannot all be right. We live in a pluralistic world, where people look at Christians making these bold claims about the word of God and about having *the* revelation from God, and they raise their eyebrows. I mean, why should we as Christians make this claim, and bring it out to people out there in the world today?

DAVE BAST

Yes, I mean, Christians say: Well, we've got the Bible; it is God's word; and Muslims say: Well, we've got the Quran. That is God's word. Is there any way of adjudicating this?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. What arguments can Christians make for the truth of the Bible?

DAVE BAST

Well, Christians have made arguments down through the centuries. One of them is the universal acceptance of the Bible; how widespread it is. It is really...I mean, it is the perennial bestseller of all books...

BOB HEERSPINK

But you cannot establish the truth of the Bible just on the number of copies sold. It is not a competition between the Quran and the Bible in terms of how many translations or how extensive these books are distributed.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but people in every culture and place have found it to be God's word. That says something; but all right...historical accuracy. I mean, the Bible has been subjected to the most intense criticism in the sense of critical reading of any book in history, and again and again, its basic accuracy has been confirmed.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that really is a distinction from many other religious books.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

The Bible contains people and places that are established...from history.

DAVE BAST

Yes, real history. Right; real history; and you can find inscriptions and other evidence that it is true. And then there is probably the favorite argument of Christians, right back to the early Church, is fulfilled prophecy. Over and over and over, Christians saw, especially in the life of Jesus, the fulfillment of prophecies given hundreds of years earlier to the Old Testament prophets. So, that is a powerful one.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that really is powerful. The Bible itself says you can tell whether a prophet is truthful by whether his prophecies are fulfilled.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, his birth, his life, the way he died, especially. The prophecies cluster around the crucifixion and the resurrection; but now, full disclosure. Honesty compels us to say this is also challenged. Jewish scholars, for example, don't see it. Frankly, you are more likely than not to just start an argument when you

try to talk about proofs that the Bible is God's word. The supreme thing that we point to is what theologians call the inner witness of the Spirit. That is to say that as you read the Bible, if you try it, God will convince you himself. You will hear God. You will meet God.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; the Bible has this power to establish a relationship between God and his people, because God is still living and active in his word.

DAVE BAST

Yes; listen to this, this wonderful passage from Psalm 119. That is the longest psalm in the Bible. It is the longest chapter in the Bible. It is a love song to scripture itself. The Psalmist says:

⁸⁹Your word, O Lord, is eternal. It stands firm in the heavens. ⁹⁶To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless. ⁹⁷Oh, how I love your Law! I meditate on it all day long. ¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ^{130b}It gives understanding to the simple. ¹⁶⁰All your words are true. All your righteous laws are eternal. ¹⁶³I hate falsehood, but I love your Law. ¹⁷²May my tongue sing of your word, for all of your commands are righteous.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that is not a logical argument.

DAVE BAST

Yes. Isn't that beautiful? You are right; it is not argument or reasoning. It is personal testimony. To him the Bible was perfection because it filled his life, you know.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, he had encountered God in scripture; and what you see there is the power of someone who is saying: I have a relationship with God because of his revelation to me.

DAVE BAST

Yes. Here is a point, I think. At some point, it is not enough just to read *about* the Bible or follow arguments about it. You have to read the Bible. You have to... Another psalm says: O, taste and see that the Lord is good. Well, the same thing applies to scripture. Taste it and see for yourself. Experience it, read it, and see if God doesn't convince you of the truth of this book. Christians have testified over and over and over for two thousand years that when they picked up the book and read it, they found Christ – they met God. They experienced it as true and perfect.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is the challenge.

DAVE BAST

Give it a try.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. I think that is the challenge in our world today. So many people talk about wanting to find God, and they talk about the Bible, but to simply open the Bible and read it, and discover as they read that God comes to them through his Spirit and testifies concerning himself. But, okay; that is not, though, everything that needs to be said...

DAVE BAST

No.

BOB HEERSPINK

Because when people read the Bible, they also argue about it...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And they have different interpretations and such.

DAVE BAST

Yes; all these different churches; all of which claim to have the message of the Bible. So, the question is: Is it possible to read the Bible and understand it?

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is what we really have to come back to. How can we open the Bible, read it, and truly understand the message that God wants to share with us?

DAVE BAST

But we also need to look at how to understand the Bible, and to do that we need to look at the big story that the Bible tells.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I think that is one of the mistakes people make as they go to scripture. They tend to divide scripture up into bits and pieces, they look at individual stories, and they miss...

DAVE BAST

Or even individual verses.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Here is a proof text, or you are Bible dipping. You know, let me open and get God's guidance for me today by pointing to a verse.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, no one would read a novel that way. Anyone reading a novel knows you have to know the whole story. There is one trajectory that is happening in that novel. It is the same way with scripture. Scripture has a big story, and it is a big story that confronts some of the other big stories out there in the world today. You know, it seems to me that there are only three big stories with regard to life...

DAVE BAST

Today, in our culture.

BOB HEERSPINK

Today. You can be a materialist; you can embrace the big story of atheistic evolution – that there is no God – no soul – no spirit. Everything is physical matter; that we crawled out of the primordial deep and we came from the oceans and we are going nowhere; or you can become a New Ager. You can say: hey, the physical world has to be rejected. It is all about the spirit. It is all about us being little bits of divinity that are working our way back to godhead; or there is the big story of scripture.

DAVE BAST

And the Bible's big story really stands in opposition to both of those others. It says that there is a God: A God who created all things; a God who is perfect and holy; a God who has a purpose for life, for us; a God who is also the ruler and the sustainer of everything that is; but it also tells us some things about ourselves: No, we are not divine. We don't have the god within that we are supposed to liberate and express.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, the Bible actually affirms both our physical and our spiritual identities.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and it says that we messed up, you know. We are sinners, to put the old word on it; but God loves us still, and that leads to the plotline of the Bible. It is a kind of adventure story of how the divine lover seeks and pursues... The hound of heaven. He comes after his sinful creatures. He won't let them go. He is determined to fix things.

BOB HEERSPINK

And now you have to look at who is at the center of the story, because the center of the story is really about a single person, and that is God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the Christian claim is that to understand the Bible, you have to see everything in terms of Christ; Old Testament as well as New; that is as much about him as the New Testament is. This is what Jesus himself said. Listen to this from Luke 24, after he rose again from the dead.

44“‘This is what I told you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.’” 45Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

Now, there is the clue – there is the key. How do you understand the Bible? You need the mind of Christ, you need, again, the work of the Spirit – the Spirit who convinces us that it is true and also can open our minds so that we understand it and see how it relates to Jesus himself.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is how you put the pieces of scripture together. You need the lens, which is Christ. You need to go to the Bible and look at all of those individual stories in the light of the whole.

DAVE BAST

So, we have the big story and we recognize that the Bible is really all about Jesus; but if that is so, then where do we find that wisdom – that practical wisdom – for our daily decisions? That is the logical next question. We will return to talk about the purpose of the Bible in a moment; but since *Groundwork* is all about digging into the scripture and applying it to our lives, we want to tell you about some additional resources we offer to guide you on your personal spiritual journey. We recommend two daily devotionals: *Today* and *Words of Hope*. Each one of them contains a Bible reading and a short meditation. They are short and concise, but they dig beneath the surface of scripture, so they are ideal for everyone with a busy life. Both of these devotionals are designed with you in mind. Whether you would like to receive each one in a booklet form or have it delivered to your e-mail each day or listen to it on your commute to work, you will always find the spiritual nourishment you are looking for. You can find out more information about *Today* and *Words of Hope* devotionals on the resource page of our website at groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

BOB HEERSPINK

So, Dave, we have been talking about the need for wisdom, that knowledge isn't enough, and we have said the Bible really contains the big story that God wants us to know and embrace. It is a story centered in Jesus; but so many people go to the Bible and they just dive into theological speculation. They start talking about the end of the world and when it might come, and it doesn't seem to have much impact on their ordinary

lives.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I love this line from John Bunyan; you know, the great *Pilgrim's Progress*, that classic work. Bunyan writes a poem at the beginning of it in which he says: This book will make a traveler of thee if by its counsel thou wilt ruled be. Well, he could just as well have been talking about the Bible itself. It makes travelers out of us. It sets us on a journey, first of all, like the magi, to find Jesus. We start out from wherever we are in life – in the world – and if we follow its plotline, it will bring us to Christ; but that is not the end; that is just the beginning; because in addition to setting us out to find Jesus, it turns us into followers of Jesus; and so, we follow him through the teachings of the Bible – Old Testament as well as New Testament.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, a lot of the psalms talk about the experience of those travelers – people on a journey with God.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And Psalm 19, for example, talks about how important the word of God is to the journey. Let me just read a few verses:

⁷The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple; ⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart; the commandments of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes; ⁹the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.

DAVE BAST

Yes; look at all of those purpose words in there. This is the Bible's testimony to itself. It says what it is about and what it is for. It is like Paul says in 2 Timothy: ^{3:16}All scripture is inspired and it is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

So, you have all these adjectives about the Bible. It is clean and it is true and it is pure and it is righteous; but the key thing is what it can do.

BOB HEERSPINK

Its impact; and those words, which interestingly also can describe God himself. The attributes of God he, as it were, shares with his word, really underscore the trustworthiness and the integrity of God's word for guiding our lives: Statutes, precepts, commands; they are all words that say: hey, get out there and live a certain way; follow the journey in a way that honors me.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, what does it do? It teaches us, it maybe corrects us where we have gone wrong or where we are doing something wrong. It gives positive guidance and instruction. To go back to the psalm, it revives the soul – the Bible revives the soul; it gives us new life.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, that means that when we approach the word of God and we read it, we really have to submit to it. We really, as travelers who are obeying its precepts, we have to put ourselves under God's word to hear and obey.

DAVE BAST

Yes; here is another phrase: It makes wise the simple. We started out by talking about wisdom – where do we get wisdom? Well, read the Bible. Wisdom in the biblical sense is about way more than just having information or knowhow, as we say, in knowing how to do something. It is really about knowing the way of life as God meant it to be and then accepting that and following that way.

BOB HEERSPINK

And the text says: The simple can be made wise. You know, so many people look at the complex world in which we live, the kind of decisions that have to be made in the light of our technology, and they say: hey, I don't have any wisdom for that.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And yet, people who are in the word, even if they say: hey, I am a simple person; really often have more wisdom for living life than people with all kinds of PhDs and all kinds of technological knowledge.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I've got a quote on my wall from John Calvin in my office. It says: The word of God was not given to make us subtle or eloquent, but for the reformation of our lives. To me, that is the bottom line. It is meant to be life changing; and not just for us to talk about or think about or get ideas or theology from.

BOB HEERSPINK

So at the end of the day, the impact of God's word is transformational. It makes us into different people than what we were before.

DAVE BAST

And not just transformation for us, but ultimately transformation for the whole cosmos.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is the big story.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Salvation is for the entire creation.

DAVE BAST

Well, obviously there is a whole lot more to say about the Bible, but that is the reason for this program: *Groundwork*.

BOB HEERSPINK

Groundwork is a way of describing scripture. We believe that scripture is the ground that we have to cultivate in order to live the kind of life God wants us to live.

DAVE BAST

Yes; Jesus also compares the word of God to seed that is sown into the soil of our lives; so, we want our lives to be good ground – good soil. We want the word to take root and grow fruit in our lives.

BOB HEERSPINK

And there are some commitments that we are making to you as you tune in this program; commitments that you can expect from us as we use scripture and unfold scripture.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, let's be honest. The Bible is not always easy to understand, and it is often misused – misappropriated. Scripture is twisted to mean what people want it to mean. I love that story from the book of

Acts of the Ethiopian eunuch. He is a guy riding along in his chariot and he is reading the Bible, and Philip asks him: Do you understand what you are reading? And he says: How can I unless somebody explains it to me? So, that is what we are hoping to do. We are going to study together and explain to each other.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. So, here are some commitments we make. On this program, we take scripture seriously. We look at its historical context. We ask what the authors intend to say and mean. We let scripture interpret scripture, and we look for those “aha” moments when a new truth of scripture jumps out at us that we hadn’t before identified.

DAVE BAST

Yes; here is another thing. We always keep the big story of the Bible in mind. That is: Creation, fall, redemption, restoration. And so, we see how the smaller stories fit into that larger picture.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; and we also keep Christ at the center. Those stories, in their own way, each relate to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

And finally, we do this in an attitude and spirit of prayer because ultimately we look for God himself, through his Spirit, to be the one who teaches us, who opens our minds to the truth to understand it, our hearts to accept it, and our wills to obey it.

BOB HEERSPINK

The Spirit is part of our conversation.

DAVE BAST

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don’t forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/is-the-bible-true>

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