

Seeking Answers in Scripture

SCOTT HOEZEE

At the end of every Groundwork conversation we ask you to share topics and passages you would like to hear discussed on Groundwork. Well, you have taken us at our word, and so today we are going to answer some of the questions that you have sent to Groundwork this year. We are glad you have joined the conversation, so let's dig into scripture to discuss practical questions like choosing a Bible translation and theological questions about how we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives. 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, again we invite inquiries and questions, and people take us up on that. We get messages through our Facebook page. We get e-mails. Sometimes we get actual letters with stamps on them; that works yet today, too. So, we have received a number of questions, and our production staff has looked at those. So we are going to discuss on this particular program two questions...two questions that are pretty significant, so we will be able to spend some time on them.

DAVE BAST

Yes; actually, we even did a whole series earlier this year in response to a regular listener who asked for some guidance about witness and evangelism; so we chose to work through II Corinthians, Paul's letter of II Corinthians, which really is a wonderful explanation of Christian ministry and Christian witness; so yes, we will do a one-off like this, or maybe even a whole series if you are interested. Today, we want to respond first to a message that we received on Facebook from Linda, who asked: What translation of the Bible do you use? Is it strictly King James Version? And since we sometimes get similar questions, especially surrounding the King James Bible, let's talk a little bit about bible translation in general; but first, just to immediately answer the question, our primary version that we use is the New International Version, the edition published, I think, in 2011. It is a little bit...the newest of the NIV editions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so that is the one we tend to use, but there are a lot of translations out there. Different churches sometimes have their preferred ones; and so, in addition to Linda's question about the King James Version particularly, we do get other questions about how do you know what a good translation is, just generally? Are they all equally good? Are there certain things you should keep in mind? So, we can talk a little bit about that; and maybe to start, what a lot of us don't think about or reflect on very often is how do we have the Bible we have today at all? Where does it come from? Well ultimately, of course, it comes from God. We believe it is the inspired word of God, and I think there is that passage in II Timothy 3, which points to...

DAVE BAST

Inspiration, as we say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the ultimate origin of scripture is that ¹⁶“all scripture is God breathed, and it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” So, ultimately, where does scripture come from? The answer is God and God’s Holy Spirit. In terms of the human process by which we have the Bible and the processes God uses, there we have several different things. We have the Hebrew Bible, which we often call the Old Testament, which is in Hebrew. There is a Greek translation of that Hebrew bible called the Septuagint, and that seems to be the version that Paul and others often quoted from in the New Testament; and then we have the Greek gospels and the letters of Paul and James and John – manuscripts and pieces of manuscripts – that have come to us from the ancient world.

DAVE BAST

Scott, you use the word *manuscript*, and that literally means written by hand. It is important for people to remember that from the beginning of the time of human writing up until the year 1463, I think it was, when Gutenberg is credited with inventing the printing press...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Every book of any kind had to be produced by hand. You had to write it; and the materials that they had to write with were not really high quality as compared to our modern paper and pencils and pens. They used papyrus, which was made from the stalks of...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Reeds.

DAVE BAST

The papyrus plant, which they would flatten and glue into pages. They sometimes used animal skins that they would scrape. It was laborious. Books were expensive. The ink did not have acid in it so it didn’t etch into the paper the way modern ink does...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it fades.

DAVE BAST

It lay on top. It could be wiped off. So, it is a very precarious thing to preserve a book from the ancient world, and what that means for the Bible is very interesting. Most books from antiquity exist in only a handful of copies; sometimes just one copy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Now, you have to imagine if you are writing something out by hand, especially a long book, it is easy to make a mistake. It is easy to get the copy wrong. The fact is, we have thousands of manuscripts, especially of the New Testament. So, by comparing many copies, it is much easier to get closer to the original.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which we don’t have.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that is another important point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In scholarly language, that is called the *autographa*, which would have been the thing written; so, we don't have anything in Paul's handwriting. Of his thirteen New Testament letters, we don't have anything in Paul's own hand. We don't have Mark's handwriting from Mark's Gospel, or John. What we have are things that were preserved from the earliest days of the Church, after these were originally written. The originals were lost; but as you said, Dave, we have copies of copies of copies; and throughout much of Church history, it was sort of a holy occupation, sometimes of monks in monasteries, who would devote themselves to the laborious process of copying to make fresh copies; but of course, as you just said, it is like playing post office. The message can change. It is easy for somebody to leave a word out by mistake, and then the next person who copies it repeats that mistake, and maybe makes another one; and so, what scholars do to get to the Bible we have today is they do their best to get as close to what we believe the original was as possible; and they have a number of different criteria – standards – by which they judge that.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and in fact, most of this detective work is very painstaking and scholarly work...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Fascinating.

DAVE BAST

Fascinating; but you have to be really committed to give your life to this; and two guys – British men named Westcott and Hort – one was a bishop, actually, the other a professor – created, really, the standard for the Greek bible – the Greek New Testament. Modern editions that are similar to that or based on their work get us as close as it is humanly possible to get to the original text.

So, let's drop in the King James Bible here a little bit. The King James Bible was published in the year 1611. It was the result of a committee appointed by King James. Its official name is The Authorized Version of the Bible; and some have said it is the only beautiful thing in history ever created by a committee.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is a brilliant work; but it is based on manuscripts that were fewer in number and not as ancient as others that were discovered after that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was the best translation possible in 1611. It was the best possible, but in the four or five hundred years since then, you know, we have had the Dead Sea Scrolls and all of the discoveries at Qumran; we have thousands of better manuscripts – older manuscripts – therefore closer; because one of the standards that the scholars have is the older the manuscript, therefore the earlier the copy, therefore the fewer errors it is likely to have; and so we have so many more. So today, all bible translations – the NIV, the New King James, the NRSV, the Common English Bible...

DAVE BAST

The ESV.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the ESV; they are all based on something far better than they could have done in the 17th Century because we have so many more manuscripts; and again, because mistakes tended to be made along the way, you want to get as close as you can to the original. Sometimes well-meaning copyists also purposely changed the text because they thought...

DAVE BAST

Make it a little more orthodox, or...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or a little easier...

DAVE BAST

Or eliminate what seemed to be a problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or try to explain a text by adding a few words; and so, there are again a number of standards. The older the manuscript the more reliable. If you have four different versions of the same verse, the shortest version is probably closer to the original, because if anything, copyists added words; and if you have five different versions of the same verse, the one that is more difficult to understand is probably closer to the original, because if anything, somebody along the way tried to smooth it out.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, these are very interesting. Again, it is detective work.

DAVE BAST

So, that is your lesson on textual criticism, but just one more word about the King James. The other problem with it is, English has changed a lot since 1611; so words have changed their meanings, and the King James Version, like its contemporary, Shakespeare, is very difficult for modern readers to understand in most places.

Now, let's talk for a moment about translation in general.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Here is the principle, and it is fascinating, really, if you stop and think about it; but God wants His word to be understood. He wants His word to be translated. So, one of the earliest stories...the story of the Day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit and they rush out into the streets of Jerusalem, and they are preaching the Gospel in other languages. It is a miracle of the Spirit for that day – that special day; and the crowd is utterly amazed and asks: Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is that each of us hears them in our own native language? We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. And that is exactly the principle that leads Christians to translate the Bible. We believe that God wants His word to be understood. We don't so reverence the literal words of the original that we refuse to translate them. That is actually the attitude that Muslims take toward the Qur'an...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Their holy book. It shouldn't be translated. If you want to read it, you have to learn Arabic. No; we have always said let's let the people hear, know, and understand. That applies not only to English translations, but to other languages as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and it is interesting, you know, there are lots and lots of languages in the world where people are grateful just to have one version, and the Bible has finally been translated into their native language. In English, we have the luxury of many, many different translations. We have mentioned many of them; and so, maybe part of what Linda was wondering, too, is how can you know if it is a good translation, or which is best? It sort of depends. I mean, translations have different standards. Some want to be very literal, and they tend to be more word for word, and if you kind of want to know exactly how the Hebrew or the Greek of the originals sound, some very literal translations are available. Others, like the New International Version, sometimes go with what they call dynamic equivalents, where they translate the idea and the upshot of the original into how we talk about that today. It is not word for word literal, but it is idea for idea literal based on those words; and then there are still other standards; some more colloquial and common speech, and some a little bit more literal; and then there is also a different category, which is *paraphrase*...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that would be like Eugene Peterson's *The Message*.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not a translation. Peterson himself doesn't think you should use that in church from the pulpit, but it is a paraphrase that goes even one step further in putting it into the language and metaphors and idioms of today.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and each one has its strength and each one has its weakness of these approaches. The strength of a more literal translation or a more word-for-word...but by the way, even there you cannot actually translate literally word for word because it just doesn't make sense.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it won't work.

DAVE BAST

I mean, if you were to ask a German the question: Wie heissen sie? Literally what you are asking is: How called you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

A good translator would translate that phrase: What is your name? So, it is not literally literal that we are looking for; but the other issue is, often translations will paraphrase or go for what is dynamically equivalent in order to help the reader understand, and that can be very useful. An example that I have sometimes used is the word – the New Testament word *sarx*, which is an important word for Paul. In the King James and the translations that have descended from it and tried to stay within that tradition, like the old RSV, the new RSV, the ESV – the English Standard Version – *sarx* is translated literally *flesh*, and every time it is used it will be translated the same way, so that you can know that is the word Paul used. The NIV tends to translate *sarx* sinful nature, which is probably what it means most of the time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But you see, it is doing the work for you, the reader, so that is the difference in philosophy. Do you want the work done for you by the editors or do you want to have to do it yourself as you interpret the Bible?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and by the way, I will put a plug in for a book by the great biblical scholar, Gordon Fee. Gordon Fee wrote a wonderful book: *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, but along with the co-author, Mark Strauss, he has a book with Zondervan called: *How to Choose a Translation for All its Worth-A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions*. So if you wanted to dig more into that, you could read Gordon Fee's book; but I think maybe as we close out this segment addressing Linda's question, I think the number one thing to stress, though, is that the Holy Spirit has been involved all along in Church history to preserve God's word. The Spirit inspired Paul and Moses and David and all of the authors of scripture, but didn't leave it at that. The Holy Spirit kept the word alive through all those faithful copyists, and now the Spirit has been working through modern scholars to help us get as accurate a bible as we can because God wants His word known; and thanks be to God, we have it.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is a great segue into our next listener question. It is about the Holy Spirit and some of the ways we might experience the Holy Spirit and His work in our life. So, we will answer that one in just a moment.
Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and this is a listener question program. We just had a question from Linda on Bible translations and how to know and how to use them. Now we have a question from Tessa, who says: Can you talk about "falling in the spirit," or being convicted by the Spirit? I have had this experience many times; it is very intense; so can you talk about different manifestations of the Holy Spirit is what Tessa is asking.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; well, it is a good question that sadly divides a lot of Christians today. You hesitate to say this, but there is a kind of pro-Holy Spirit camp and a camp that is a little more resistant or fearful of what are some of the more special, apparently, manifestations of the Spirit in a person's life. So, let's talk a little bit about that first, and what the Bible might have to say about that. Paul, in the New Testament, addresses the question of gifts of the Holy Spirit – experiences that we might call supernatural or ecstatic, such as speaking in tongues and having prophecies, and even visions. He says he himself was caught up to heaven in a sense, which would be a work of the Spirit, I guess; but it doesn't really talk about some of the things that in the modern Church we are seeing that people claim are spiritual experiences.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we have had...there was...many people will remember...some may have been there, or had an experience there: The Toronto blessing. There was a Vineyard Church near the Toronto, Canada airport, and they had a fairly long stretch there, where in the worship services people...sometimes they fainted dead away and sometimes that has been called "slaying in the spirit," but that has been...being slain in the spirit is something we can talk about in a minute because that has happened and been touted in many more places; but there was some very unique, let's say, things that happened at that Toronto church, including people who had uncontrollable fits of laughing, uncontrollable fits of crying, shaking physically; some barked like a dog or roared like a lion; and all of these things were said to be manifestations of the Spirit. Now, really, *none* of them have any precedent in the Bible. That does not rule them out. We are going to talk in a minute about kind of how to assess or evaluate that; but none of those things have any precedent in the Bible, except for some do think that this fainting dead away or being slain in the spirit – some think that does have a biblical

precedent from the Garden of Gethsemane when the Roman soldiers come to arrest Jesus and they say: Are you Jesus? And He says: I am *He*; and the guards fall away – they fall to the ground; and some claim, well, that is the proof text for being slain in the spirit. Probably that doesn't work – that doesn't rule it out as authentic today, but that is probably *not* what was happening in Gethsemane.

DAVE BAST

No; that seems to be something else all together. It is a manifestation of Christ's authority. It is in John 18, but nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. I think it is difficult to answer these questions about personal experiences because one finds it difficult to distinguish whether this is some psychological effect, or even mass hysteria; whether there is, in other words, an ordinary cause to it – an earthly cause – or whether it actually is the finger of God – the touch of the Holy Spirit on a person. Certainly, we would believe, I think, and we would say as Reformed people that the Spirit is sovereign; and that is a phrase, incidentally, of the Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, the great Welsh preacher. The Spirit can do what He will and manifest Himself how He will; and I think if you have had an experience that you would consider supernatural or spirit inspired, whether it is a language or a physical feeling that comes over your body, if it leads to peace, and especially if it leads you closer to Christ, then that would be the test that this is indeed of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A very good friend of mine who went to the church near the Toronto airport some years ago, totally skeptical, did not really believe it, had this experience completely against his will, that he fell back – he fainted dead away; but he said that after that he felt great peace and he did feel closer to Christ, and so it didn't feel like something he had cooked up. It certainly didn't feel demonic or something bad; and I think...and if we were to think about kind of a checklist if we wanted to kind of talk about that: How could you assess experiences you might have of being convicted by the spirit or even slain in the spirit or speaking in tongues or whatever it may be, we have to remember the Spirit's main job – the principal work of the Spirit in the Church is to point to Christ; and so, if your experience brings you closer to Christ, that is a sign of the Spirit. The Spirit is here to build up unity in the Church and not to cause dissention, so you know, if your gift or your experience helps other people and is a comfort to other people, that certainly would be a sign of the Holy Spirit as well. The Spirit is here to point to Jesus, to build up unity, to bring people closer together and bring comfort in the Gospel. If all of those things feel confirmed, it could very well be a mark of the Spirit's work even if it isn't something specifically located in the Bible.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and you know, the second part of Tessa's question asks us to talk a little bit about being convicted by the Holy Spirit; and there we are on much more solid biblical ground because the Bible talks about... Jesus Himself talked about that in the upper room the night before His crucifixion; in John 14, He says that He is going to send another advocate or helper or comforter, as in the old version, to help you and be with you forever: ¹⁷The Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. So, He is speaking of Himself coming in the Person of the Spirit. The Spirit is linked to Jesus; and Jesus also says the Spirit will convict you, in another place, of sin and righteousness and judgment. So, that is the primary work of the Spirit. In John 5 Jesus said:

³²There is another who bears witness to Me, and I know that His witness is true – that is John 5:31; and again, He is talking about the Holy Spirit.

So, here is a wonderful statement by Dale Bruner, the great New Testament commentator, from his commentary on John 5:31: This is the witness that all of us who have been hearers of John through the centuries have been inwardly experiencing in our contacts with Jesus, and why we felt the confidence we do in Jesus. We are convinced of the Son's truthfulness by the accrediting witness of His Father's Spirit to our minds and hearts. There is no higher proof. Whenever Jesus speaks His word, the Father's Spirit speaks His witness, accompanying and seconding what Jesus is saying; and believers are convinced afresh that this is the deepest truth we have ever heard. That is what the Spirit does.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I always remember Dale Bruner when he would teach bible courses. He had a very simple way to illustrate what the Spirit would do, and it was just in that quote. Dale would draw a stick figure of Jesus on a whiteboard, and then Dale would get behind the whiteboard and just poke his finger around and point to Jesus. That is what the Spirit does. He is again and again pointing us to Jesus, convicting us of the Gospel's truth; and wherever that happens, wherever we can say an even heartier Amen to the message that Jesus is Lord, that alone is evidence that the Spirit is at work.

DAVE BAST

Thanks be to God; and thank you for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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