

What the Bible Says about Itself

SCOTT HOEZEE

If you wanted to know whether a certain person is trustworthy and reliable, probably the one piece of evidence you might find the least compelling would be what that person says about himself. You would probably want to hear from other sources before really believing it. Well, today on Groundwork, we want to hear what the Bible says about itself in terms of trustworthiness; but if it strikes you as odd to let the book you want to check out speak for itself, we will come to see that that is not so strange after all. 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, this is part two of just a little two-parter that we are doing on seeing what does the Bible say about itself in terms of its reliability and its trustworthiness. In the first program, we looked at what Jesus said about the Bible, and now in this particular program we are going to see what scripture says about itself. As we mentioned in the first program, our listener, Collette – Collette, you asked us about how can you prove the Bible; and well, we cannot really prove it to the satisfaction of our fiercest critics, but we do prove it by living it, by having scripture change us and transform us from the inside out – the Holy Spirit lives in us. We also, though, listen closely to what the Spirit says about scripture, and that is going to be the focus also of this program when we look at some words – we are going to look at three different texts today from the Apostles Paul and Peter, and what they had to say about scripture.

DAVE BAST

Right. You know, there is an old saying: The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It does not really matter how good it looks; it is when you taste it that you decide whether it is any good or not. For scripture, it seems to me the proof of its reliability, of its truthfulness, is the kind of people that it produces. So, that is kind of scary, on the one hand; but it is also wonderfully encouraging on the other. I have sometimes said that the best advertisement for Christianity is the lives of Christians. Of course, it can also be the worst advertisement, but nevertheless, what does scripture say about itself and how do those words come to impact the lives of those of us who accept it? I mean, it is a common criticism that scoffers or unbelievers will say: Well, every religion has its holy book; how come the Bible is better than the Quran, or why the New Testament instead of the Old, or what about this, that, or the other thing? Our answer is to look in part at what the Bible says about itself, and last time we looked especially about what Jesus thought and said and did with respect to the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now we are going to see what a couple of the key apostles thought. We should just point out in the passages we are going to look at, with the possible exception of the last one that we will get to in the final segment of this program, but generally when the Apostles Paul or Peter talked about scripture, they were talking about what we now call the Old Testament. The New Testament did not exist yet. It was being written. By the time Paul and Peter wrote their letters, the Gospels had not even been written down yet. Probably Paul and Peter did not necessarily know self-consciously that they were writing new scripture, so

when they refer to scripture, they are referring to the Hebrew Bible as it was written down probably 4th, 5th, 6th centuries B.C. There was the oral tradition...

DAVE BAST

In its final form, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, there was oral tradition for a long time, but it finally got set down in the books – you know, most of the books we know today, Genesis through Malachi – so, just as a reminder that when we hear Paul and Peter referring to scripture, that is what they mean.

DAVE BAST

Right; and this is very interesting, really, if you stop and think about it. So, what we call the Bible is actually a whole library of books...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; 66...

DAVE BAST

There are 66 of them written in primarily two, but a little bit of a third, different languages; primarily Hebrew and Greek; written by a whole host of people, some of whose names we know, some of them we don't; many of the books are anonymous. There was editing done, undoubtedly, on many of them – different editors would put together things. I mean, over the span of at least hundreds of years, perhaps a thousand or more, and yet, the Bible, when it speaks about itself – when it speaks about the scriptures – the Old Testament and by extension the New Testament – speaks as though they have a single author, as though they come from one source, as though they can all be put together in this one collection, which somehow is a coherent whole – it is a whole story; and that in itself is rather remarkable.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and that is exactly how Paul talks about it in the text we want to read now from II Timothy, the third chapter, verses 10 to 17. Here is what Paul writes to Timothy as he is a young pastor working in Ephesus. Paul writes:

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions and sufferings; what kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra – the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ¹³while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, the key text there is the last verse, verse 16: All scripture is God-breathed or inspired...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Inspired or breathed into by God...

DAVE BAST

Exactly; the word *spiration* at the heart of that – inspiration means to breathe into, respiration means to breathe over and over – to re-breathe – and the word that Paul uses literally means to breathe out; so, the idea is not so much that God breathed into these human words on the page and made them his, it is that he himself breathed them out through their human authors onto the page so that he is their ultimate source; as we

sometimes say, God is the ultimate author of the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as you said earlier, Dave, there are a lot of books – 39 of them – in what we call the Old Testament, and that is what Paul is referring to here; and yet, Paul refers to them as though they are just one book with one author, God. So, we are talking about Genesis through Malachi here, and yet, Paul says something rather striking to Timothy. He says: Look, you have known the Holy Scriptures – by which he means the Old Testament – ever since you were an infant, so keep on in that because you will know the truth of them through your faith in Christ Jesus. Well, now, the name of Jesus and Jesus of Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament. Jesus of Nazareth did not exist yet in the Old Testament. So, how can Paul say to Timothy: Look, your knowledge of scripture is all going to come together in your faith in Christ Jesus? How does that go? What does Paul mean there?

DAVE BAST

Well, that is a huge question, and a very good one. We did look at it in our previous program, but I think it deserves to be revisited. How is it that the scriptures of the Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures – can make Timothy wise when he knows them because they will make him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? We will look at 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 we have just looked, Dave, at a passage from II Timothy 3, where Paul claims that all scripture is God-breathed – it is breathed out by God through human authors so that God's truth gets across as the inspiration of scripture, as we talked about it; but we also know Paul was referring there to what we call the Old Testament, and yet he says to Timothy: You will be wise in salvation if you know those scriptures through your faith in Christ Jesus; and so here is another more than a little bit of a hint that somehow all of scripture comes together in Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right. I think that is also the point made in a slightly different way in a passage from the Apostle Peter writing in his second letter, beginning at verse 16 of Chapter 1. Let's listen; Peter writes:

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And now he seems to be thinking of the story of what we call the transfiguration in the New Testament. He goes on to say:

¹⁷He (Jesus) received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophets' own interpretation of things. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is another passage, similar to the one we just saw from II Timothy in Paul's writings, where Peter is yoking together Jesus – the transfiguration of Jesus, and prophecy, the scriptures; and of course, although

Peter does not mention it specifically here, we know that in the stories we find in Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9 – the transfiguration stories – Moses and Elijah – Law and Prophets – appear with Jesus...

Dave Bast: In other words, the Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The whole Old Testament appears with Jesus, and this is the Son of God who is himself now the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets – of Moses and Elijah – the whole kit and caboodle of the Old Testament; and that this is the prophetic message, the word of the prophets, that all lead to God's anointed one, to the Messiah, to Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; and what that story, that wonderful story of the transfiguration, seems to be saying to us through symbolism is not only that the Old Testament – the Law and the Prophets – bear witness to Jesus or are fulfilled in Jesus, but that Jesus himself drew strength and comfort and understanding from his knowledge of the Old Testament. This happened shortly before the crucifixion, and it is as though Jesus is once again revisiting all those stories and all those symbols and all those prophecies, taking from them strength and understanding as he goes about his message as he is about to fulfill. It is a beautiful thing. Then Peter adds this wonderful image when he says that these human writers of all these different books, and by extension again we are going to include him and Paul and the other New Testament writers, they were not just writing out of their own minds or out of their own heads. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit; they were carried along by the wind of the Spirit the way a ship is pulled by its sails – that is the image of speech that Peter uses. So they were filled with the Spirit so that what they wrote was, in fact, their words. We believe in a kind of double authorship. It is a human book and we read it like any other human book, but at the same time what they wrote was what God wanted to be communicated, so it is his word, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so here is the funny thing about this same passage, Dave, that we just read from II Peter; Peter does not make any claims for himself that he is writing scripture the same as Jeremiah or Malachi or Micah or Moses or David; but he has just retold the story of the Transfiguration, something he himself was an eyewitness of; and so there is a sense in which Peter might be saying more here than he knows without maybe making the claim explicitly, there is a sense in which he now is being used by the Holy Spirit to tell the story of Jesus, and this is not originating with him either. So, he is not making any explicit claims to say: Hey, look folks, this letter you are reading that I just wrote – it is the Bible, too. No, he would never say that, and he might not have been fully conscious of that; and yet, if you connect the dots, the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost – if that is the same Spirit that inspired Moses and David and Amos, well, now he is inspiring Peter.

DAVE BAST

Yes. You know, it is a very interesting question, and one that we cannot answer because we are trying to get inside the heads of people long dead, but did the writers of the Bible know that they were, in fact, inspired as they were writing in a unique way, and that their words would be taken as no other human words are? We sometimes use that word *inspiration* rather loosely. We will say some poet was inspired when he wrote this beautiful poem, or some novelist wrote an inspired book; and we mean that in a lower sense – that they were just very creative – they really were on their game at that moment; but when we speak of the inspiration of the writers of the Bible, or of the text of the Bible, we mean something that is qualitatively different; not just higher or greater, but of a totally different kind, so that when we actually read this book, we hear in it a voice like no other, and it comes to us with an authority like no other book; and it begins to inhabit us and to change us – as we said in our earlier program – from the inside out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, right; how aware was Peter of this? We do not fully know, but insofar as he connects up a moment in Jesus' ministry when Moses and Elijah showed up to prophecies and to the Holy Spirit... and of course, there is a sense in which the actual title, "Holy Spirit," was never really used in the Old Testament either, the full awareness of the third person of the Trinity came about after Pentecost, and so now Peter is

connecting that. So, if you are God's chosen person to tell the story of Jesus, who is the fulfillment of all scripture that came before, is it just possible that you now are also writing as a Holy Spirit inspired person? Well, in our final segment we are going to look at one very curious passage – again from Peter – where Peter does tip his hand that there was some awareness of this already in the early Church, and that this also inspires our ability to see the Bible as utterly trustworthy, and we will look at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork; and in this program, we are digging into what the Bible says about itself; specifically, New Testament passages, the first one from Paul in the book of II Timothy; the second two passages are from II Peter, and in the prior segment we read his words from chapter 1 about inspiration – how that works. It is like the Holy Spirit filled the writers of scripture the way the wind fills the sail of a ship, and thus they wrote; not out of their own human will, but according to what God wanted them to say; and here is another passage now. We have been talking about the intriguing question: Did they know that they were writing scripture as they wrote? And Peter seems to indicate that in some sense perhaps they did, or at least he thought that about his colleague, Paul. So, this is II Peter 3:14: So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him (with God). ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation; just as our dear brother, Paul, also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, (Yes, we would agree with that.) which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁷Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position; ¹⁸but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

So, there, Dave, and you highlighted it by inflecting your voice a minute ago, but if you were paying even moderate attention to this passage, the words that leap out at you are where Peter says: Paul has written things, and some people distort what Paul writes, just as they do the *other* scriptures, and that means Peter is saying: Paul is scripture. If you are going to lump Paul together with the other scriptures, Peter is saying, our brother, Paul, counts as scripture. Peter did not claim that about himself, but he is now claiming it about Paul.

DAVE BAST

Right; but I think the implication is there, pretty clearly, that Peter would have believed that about himself, too. The apostles were conscious of having a unique sort of authority because Jesus himself gave it to them. It is plain from the outset that one of the premier marks of the early Church was the apostolic authority that they placed themselves under. Acts 2:42 says that the first mark of the early Church was they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So somehow, there was a sense that Paul could say: Am I not an apostle? In other words, I have the authority to say these things to you. I can command you as Christians because Jesus has given the apostles – these chosen eyewitnesses – that kind of authority that no one else has.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and let's just admit, this does not count as proof that we...

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is not a knockdown argument.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But I think we would have to say that Paul and Peter and the other people who wrote the New Testament – they were either off their rockers and were just making ludicrous, grandiose claims, or they were full of the Holy Spirit, and that means their words are reliable, and they are trustworthy, and that they would not have made those claims if they were not full of the Holy Spirit. They certainly did not see any power in

themselves. They laid it all at the feet of the Holy Spirit; and so, we do believe scripture is trustworthy, and if it seems unusual – a wheel within a wheel – to say that scripture is testifying to itself is enough for us, well, it is not so strange after all because there is a larger consistency to all of this; but as we close this program, Dave, and this little, two-part series, maybe we could just close a little bit by saying: So what? Why should this matter to us, what Paul and Peter wrote about the Bible two thousand years ago? How is that relevant for us today?

DAVE BAST

Well, we go back to the question that started this all off from Collette, who asked: How do we prove the Bible? What do we say when people critique it, as so many are doing now? It is just a bunch of old wives tales or fairy stories; it is just human opinion; it is like any other – all of these different religious books, each claiming to be from God – how do we know that the Bible is? In a sense, we can say: Yes, this is what the Bible says about itself. This is what Jesus believed about it, and if you have a high opinion of Jesus, you might want to take that into account; but in the end, Christians have long said that only God will convince you of this truth. It is something that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writers of the scripture originally, can do for its readers today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think we do take comfort in that in the face of higher criticisms, as it is called; or a few years ago on a very popular level, a lot of people were conscious of this thing called the Jesus seminar, where a bunch of scholars got together and kind of atomized the Bible into all kinds of parts, some were reliable, some were not reliable; some were from Jesus, some were not. The whole thing, you know, just looked like a human artifact – the whole Bible just looked like a human enterprise. Well, I think we take great comfort in the idea that, look, the Holy Spirit did not just inspire the writers and then leave the whole process. We do believe the Holy Spirit was involved in every step along the way. He inspired Amos; He inspired Matthew; He inspired Paul and Peter and John; and then made sure that this got written down, made sure that this got preserved. When the early Church got together to decide which books were going to be in the Canon, as we call it, the Holy Spirit was involved in that. Yes, it is all a human process every step along the way, but the eyes of faith reveal that Holy Spirit hovering over the whole thing all along, and in fact, right up until today when we read it.

DAVE BAST

Yes. You know, this business about parts of it are okay but parts of it are not. Parts of it you can take as truth – the teachings of Jesus, you know, love your enemy – turn the other cheek – these beautiful things. It always strikes me as rather odd that people would argue that way because the chief witness of the writers of the New Testament, the apostles and those in their immediate circle, is that Jesus Christ was crucified and on the third day he rose again from the dead. That was the message to which they bore witness; and Paul says famously in I Corinthians 15: Look, if we are wrong about that, you cannot accept anything that we have said because this is our central claim. If that is not true – if we are lying – then we are lying straight through from beginning to end. You have no words of Jesus – you have no teaching of Jesus – because they all come from these apostles. So it is an all or nothing thing. If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then you should believe the Bible. It is the word of God through and through. If you do not believe Jesus rose from the dead, well then, fine.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but if you do, then you find in scripture the words of life; and unlike any other book you could read, you have what John Calvin calls the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. You open the Bible at your kitchen table in the morning and the Holy Spirit testifies to your spirit that you are encountering a living voice – God's own voice – because the Bible tells me so, because the Spirit tells me so; and for us Christians, that is enough.

DAVE BAST

Yes, amen. 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. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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