

What You're Wondering (Part 1)

DAVE BAST

At the end of every Groundwork conversation, we ask you to share what topics and passages you would like to hear discussed on Groundwork. Well, you have taken us at our word and responded with interesting and sometimes challenging topics and passages; both theological and practical in nature. We are glad you have joined the conversation, and today we will dig into scripture together to answer some of the questions you have asked Groundwork this year. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and joining us today on the program is our producer, Courtney Jacob; Courtney, great to have you here. You are usually behind the scenes and kind of checking on us, but you are joining us today.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes; it is different to be on this side of the microphone; good to be here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, again, Dave, as you said in the introduction here, we do, through our Facebook page, through direct e-mails, sometimes letters in the regular mail, we get questions from listeners. In fact, we just did a two-part series on the trustworthiness of scripture and that kind of resulted from a listener question – from a listener named Collette – and on this program, we have a few other questions; in fact, we have two questions that we will take up in this first segment; one from Chris and one from Katrina, both of which sort of wonder a little bit about something the Bible does not specifically spell out.

COURTNEY JACOB

Well, I picked these because we notice this a lot when we hear from people that – and I see it in Bible study when I talk to people – everybody kind of wants to know something that is not necessarily in scripture; so both of these questions have to do with where are people when something is going on?

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, one of the most famous of those kinds of speculative questions is the old question about what was God doing before creation?

COURTNEY JACOB

Oh, yes.

DAVE BAST

And you know how Luther answered that? He was preparing hell for people who ask questions that are speculative like that.

COURTNEY JACOB

I had not heard that.

DAVE BAST

It's a little bit strong, so we are not suggesting that with respect to any of our friends; but it is kind of dangerous sometimes to sort of speculate about things the Bible does not explain fully; but nevertheless, these are real questions.

COURTNEY JACOB

Right; so, we want to address that. Chris had asked: Where was Adam when Eve was tempted?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a very interesting question because we do always see Adam and Eve together, and then all of a sudden the story shifts and it looks like Eve is off on her own. The serpent talks just to her...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; here is the story from Genesis 3: The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman – so, he is just addressing her – “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree of the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden; and you must not touch it or you will die – she expands a little bit there – He did not say you could not touch it – and then the lie of the serpent: ^{4b}“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman, ⁵“for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶And when the woman saw – the woman saw – that the fruit of the tree was good for food, and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. So, the question is, where is Adam? Well, the very next phrase said: She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who was with her...

DAVE BAST

Was he there all the time, or did she have to go find him and say: Hey, you should try some of this stuff, it is really tasty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It does not look like she has to go find him.

COURTNEY JACOB

Right; and the Bible just does not say; so it seems like the simple answer is: Who was with her. I think the trouble is when we try to extrapolate that into other areas, and what does it mean, and who was deceived?

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; I mean, there has been a temptation to blame the woman right from the get-go; in fact, Adam is the first person who does that. There is this famous painting, I think it is a medieval painting, of the moment when God accosts them and Adam is pointing the finger at Eve and Eve is pointing the finger at the serpent. You know, everybody is scapegoating, trying to say: It wasn't my fault! It wasn't my fault!

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God was not having any of it; I mean, God did not buy it, so I don't know why we would buy it, that it was just Eve's fault. They were together in this, which is probably why most of the time in the New Testament when Paul talks about sin he does not say: In Eve we all sinned. He says: In Adam – the first Adam – that is who sinned; and so, the second Adam – Christ – is the one who will reverse the bad effects of

that. So, Adam and Eve are together and are blamed together, are punished together, and thereafter in scripture, for the most part, it is Adam who sinned. “In Adam’s fall we sinned all” as the little traditional poem puts it; so they are together, and I think that is probably the most we can say on this. We may have an image – a Sunday school picture of Eve all by herself, but if Adam was with her, then maybe they were, indeed, standing right next to each other.

DAVE BAST

To me, what comes through most strongly in this is sort of complementary – they are a pair – they are partners – solidarity – they are in it together. The primary creation account in Genesis 1 says that God created man in His image; male and female He created them; so, to be man, to be human, is to be male and female. Both are equally human; both are equally to blame – equally responsible for the turn away from God; and the idea, the old lie of the devil: You shall be like God – the idea is they would make up for themselves what constituted good and evil. That was the fundamental sin – to decide for yourself: I will choose. I will set my course. I will decide for me what is my good; and to reject the authority and the revelation of God. That is the fundamental problem, and they both do it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

COURTNEY JACOB

So, we have this question about the beginning of humanity and sin and being together, but now let’s go to God’s answer, which comes from Katrina. She asks us a question: Where was Jesus while He was in the grave three days?

Scott Hoezee;

So, this is a similar question: Where was? Just like, where was Adam? Where was Jesus? Very good question; a lot of people do wonder about it; and there have been different answers to this in the tradition of the Church. There is a tradition called the “harrowing of hell,” that says that Jesus, when He died, went to hell, or went to the realm of the dead – to Hades – or whatever – and preached hope to Abraham and Sarah and Moses and everybody who was kind in a holding cell, and that at the day of His resurrection, Jesus broke through the gates of death and led captives in His train, as they say, and took all those people out and brought them into the kingdom of God on the day of the resurrection. So, some believe that He literally – when we say in the Apostles’ Creed: He descended into hell, that is one tradition. Not everyone buys that. Some think that was a metaphorical thing and He was in the bosom of the Father for those days, but...

DAVE BAST

Well, the Greek Church calls this idea the *anastasis* – the resurrection – and it is one of the subjects of some of the most beautiful frescos in ancient Greek churches of Jesus breaking open the gates of hell and leading out of there all the saints of the Old Testament who had been waiting for His victory; and there is this obscure passage in I Peter 3 that speaks of Him going in the spirit and preaching to the captives. That is not entirely clear. What does seem clear to me is what He says to the thief on the cross in the Gospel of Luke: Today you will be with Me in paradise. And what does seem clear to me is that when Jesus rose from the dead, it was to enter the life of the kingdom and the world to come; and what happened during that interval, who are we to say other than, yes, I think He was in paradise in the meantime; but again, this is kind of speculative, so...

COURTNEY JACOB

This is a common – not maybe this question particularly, but this speculative questioning: Is it in scripture, or isn’t it? I would tell somebody it is okay to be curious, but is there something you would caution when we have these speculative questions?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, I think probably the caution would be not to become dogmatic about it; not to be absolutely sure that He did go to hell or He did not go to hell, He went to paradise. There is enough ambiguity in the very couple,

three texts that we can be open about it. We can have an idea on this and it should be consistent with the work of salvation that Jesus did, but we should not get too bent out of shape or too dogmatic on things that are speculative or that scripture itself leaves open. We know that whatever happened during those three days, they tied in with God's plan of salvation, and the accomplishment of that came on Easter morning, and that is the Good News, and that is what we are very, very firm about.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and here is the great verse for all these kinds of questions. It was one of Calvin's favorite verses: Deuteronomy 29:29: The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this Law. So, let the secret things belong to Him. The things that we need to know, He has made clear to us that we may follow His Law.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We shout where scripture shouts and we whisper where scripture whispers, as Calvin said, and that is where we leave it.

Next we will discuss a couple of questions that have to do with prophecy, so stay tuned.

BREAK:

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

I am Scott Hoezee.

COURTNEY JACOB

And I am Courtney Jacob.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are taking listener questions today on this particular program of Groundwork. We are going to go to a Facebook question that came from Steve. Steve, you were wondering about Ezekiel, and just what did Ezekiel see and we kind of assume you mean Ezekiel's opening vision, and so let's think about that for a minute.

DAVE BAST

Right; and so, Ezekiel writes... I better skip some of the verses because it is long and it is complicated.

COURTNEY JACOB

But you can read them anytime. This is Ezekiel 1.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is Ezekiel 1. He sees a windstorm and an immense cloud with lightning and what look like four living creatures in the middle of it who look kind of human, but they had four faces and four wings. The big part of it is:

¹⁵As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. ¹⁶This was the appearance and structure of the wheels; they sparkled like topaz, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel – wheels within wheels is where that phrase comes from – and it is this incredible, kind of mind-blowing, sort of book of Revelation-like vision.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a kid growing up in the 1970s the United States went through a real UFO craze, and I remember there was somebody who published an article that claimed Ezekiel saw a UFO – he saw a flying saucer –

which freaked me out when I was a kid; but this guy even kind of drew a picture of what Ezekiel saw, and kind of made it look like a flying saucer. I don't think Ezekiel was seeing ET or Martians here; but it is an apocalyptic vision. Ezekiel is an apocalyptic book; and as with the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic passages in also Daniel, we are very... we have to interpret this very, very carefully, and not at all literally. Apocalyptic is, by its very nature, like a dream, and you know how dreams can be.

DAVE BAST

Right; and he says at the end of Chapter 1: ^{28b}This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord – the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord – so, he is kind of distancing God as He is in Himself from this. He is saying: This is symbolic; this is imagery; it represents the omnipresence of God; we might say God is everywhere; God moves freely about the earth; but also His glory – His otherness – His holiness – His mystery. It is kind of mind-blowing because God is mind-blowing.

COURTNEY JACOB

So it is not a direct picture of God, but it represents and it is describing the glory of God...

DAVE BAST

And it is not a UFO or anything like that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, I am pretty sure that is wrong.

DAVE BAST

There is a wonderful passage... I dug out a commentary on this just to get a little back-up, by John B. Taylor in the Tyndale Old Testament commentary series on Ezekiel, and I think he has a splendid passage about this. He says of this vision: It was unutterably splendid, mysteriously intricate, superhuman and supernatural, infinitely mobile but never earthbound, all-seeing and all-knowing. This is how God revealed Himself to Ezekiel; not by propositions regarding His character, but in personal encounter. That is kind of good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and again, when humans see even snippets of God's glory, how can you put it into words? Ezekiel put it into these particular words because it was something that finally defies human description; but Ezekiel is, among other things – there is apocalyptic in Ezekiel, but Ezekiel is also considered one of the prophets in the Bible, and that leads to Gail's question. Gail, you e-mailed us and asked: What is the Reformed view of biblical prophecy? What is the place of prophecy in scripture, and a Reformed view of that? Gail's question is a good one because I think there is often confusion about prophecy. If you say prophecy, or so-and-so is a prophet, what they will immediately think is: Oh, that is someone who predicts the future. They foretell what the future is. They make predictions, like Nostradamus or something; and that is not really quite what the Reformed view or a lot of Christian views of prophecy is. Prophecy is not just predicting the future. It is not foretelling future events; it is forthtelling the truth of God for also this present moment; it is an interpreting of the times, present and future, in the light of God.

COURTNEY JACOB

When I think about the – we call them the prophetic books of the Old Testament, each of those prophets is addressing the current reality of their times; maybe making some predictions about what will happen, but really, also writing about what you are saying; what God's reaction is and how this relates to God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, as far as predicting the future is concerned, I would say it is a Reformed view – I would say it is a sound biblical principle of interpretation not to go too far in the direction of specific predictions of particular events that are going to happen; like: This is Russia in the book of Revelation – that kind of stuff. That it is much sounder to see prophecy – including New Testament prophets – and they are mentioned in the

New Testament – primarily as those who can proclaim the word of God as preaching; and certainly, you can extrapolate consequences of present behavior for future reality because the Bible does that. It warns of judgment if sin is persisted in; but essentially, there is a kind of an itch in the human mind and imagination: I really want to know; I want to know what is going to happen. I want to know...

COURTNEY JACOB

Life would be so much easier if we knew what was going to happen.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I want to know when... Are we in the end times? I think, on biblical grounds, that ought to be resisted; and instead, the emphasis of Revelation, for example, is: Be faithful, the world is a scary place; there is trouble coming; there is always trouble for the Church in every age; but be faithful and don't worry, we have won.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the Reformed view also says: Any given prophecy – and this goes also to Jesus and the Olivet discourses in the Gospels, as well as the book of Revelation – you cannot say: When will this come true? Because we look for what is called multiple horizons of fulfillment. When Jesus predicts what things are going to be like leading up to the end times, He is not just saying this is going to happen once. You know, in 1999 or something; no, He is saying this is going to keep happening. This is going to repeat itself cyclically in history. When Isaiah looks forward to a Messiah, he looks forward to an ultimate Messiah, but also some mini Messiahs along the way. So, you always look for multiple horizons of fulfillment; so that means, a Reformed view, in answer to your question, Gail, a Reformed view of prophecy is not just connecting one dot of prediction to one dot of fulfillment; it is much more textured; much more nuanced than that.

DAVE BAST

Well, speaking of Reformed views of things, we have a couple of questions that we are going to close the program with that have to do with sound doctrine and different denominations, and what is Reformed, anyway? To that we turn in just a moment.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast and Courtney Jacob, and you are listening to Groundwork.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes, and today we are talking about questions about scripture theology, living faith that you have asked us recently. So, Andrew asked: Talk about sound doctrine. What is sound doctrine? What about all the different denominations? Who should you consider a brother and sister in Christ? What is sound doctrine?

DAVE BAST

Well, I think that we can start with that last one because that is a New Testament phrase; it is Pauline; it is from II Timothy, and it is pretty easily defined, I believe; but here is the context; II Timothy 4:

¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction; ³for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine; instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. Whoa, I love that! So, pretty clear: sound doctrine is biblical doctrine – preach the word, Paul says; and the opposite is saying what people want to hear – what their ears are itching to be scratched with. So, messages that conform to the cultural expectations that people have.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think, Andrew, for your question in particular, you asked also the big question: How do we know who are our real brothers and sisters in Christ – all these denominations – lots of disagreements – so, does any one of them have sound doctrine and the others don't? I think what is important to realize – and Paul talks about sound doctrine in that passage, Dave, that you just read, but also in Titus; it comes up quite a bit in these pastoral epistles; but most of the time... Now, sound doctrine can come to mean anything and everything in the Church, from sacraments to practice of prayer to how you construct your liturgy and hold your worship services, but I think it is important to realize that in the early Church when Paul says “preach the word,” he tells Timothy to preach the word; when he tells Titus: Stay on those people on the island of Crete – keep them in sound doctrine – what they mostly mean has to do with the identity of Christ. If you believe Christ is the Son of God who died and rose again from the dead, that is the core of the word. Everything else is secondary to that; and the number one dividing line in the First Century was those who were anti-Christ – who denied Christ was anybody special – and those who saw Christ as the true Son of God. So, who are our brothers and sisters in Christ? Well, primarily those who are able to affirm that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely right. It is all about the person of Jesus. I mean, if you believe that Jesus died and rose again – if you love Jesus, and if you are seeking to follow Jesus, then you are my brother or sister in Him because I am trying to do the same thing and I believe the same thing. No denomination, no tradition, has it all. We all make mistakes; we all have blind spots; so we listen to each other, but it is all about being rooted and grounded in Christ.

COURTNEY JACOB

Right; and I am just going to throw in a little shameless plug here: For more teaching on identifying sound doctrine, we have done a few programs in the past on Groundwork. We have “Picking a Church in a Buyer's Market.” We did a series on worship, in which we talked about identifying preaching and recognizing sound doctrine – biblical teaching.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that, to get back, also, Dave, to what you were talking about, about itching ears and so forth; when we detect that a church has started to drift; when you maybe do start to have reasons to wonder: Are they fellow Christians – the people who belong to that? Well, again, if you can answer the question: What do they think of Jesus; and they believe He is the incarnate Son of God who died and rose again from the dead, then they are fellow Christians for sure; but it is interesting, isn't it, that in the marketplace of ideas and in our culture today, when churches drift away from that, it does not come because they have some funny idea about how often you should pray; it does not usually come because of something on the side. No, it often starts right at that core. They start to say: Well, Jesus is *one* way of salvation, but there could be other ways. He was a good teacher, but there are other good teachers in history, too. It is Jesus who gets watered down, first and foremost, and that is the sound doctrine that Paul and the other New Testament writers would not tolerate for one second, because whittle away that and everything else falls.

DAVE BAST

The earliest reference we have to Christian worship from a non-Christian source is from a letter to the Roman emperor, Trajan, written in the year, 112 A.D., by a Roman governor named Pliny, and he said of the Christians: They gather the first day of the week, early in the morning, and they sing hymns to Christ as to a god. And that is the hallmark right there. Do you worship Jesus Christ as God? If you do, that is what it means to be a Christian; and then, live accordingly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is probably also why, in the earliest centuries of the Christian Church, and certainly after the time of Constantine, when the Church kind of came out of the catacombs and was able to come up above ground, what were the first things they wondered about? Well, the Trinity, the incarnation, the nature of Christ. It

took a while to hammer all that out – several hundred years and major Church councils at Nicaea and Constantinople and Chalcedon; but why were those the first questions? Because they were the most important questions. Don't get Jesus right; don't get the Trinity right; don't make Jesus God, and the whole thing is off the rails. That remains every bit as true today as it was then.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and Courtney Jacob today; and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com and tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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