

Dramatic Messages from God

DARRELL DELANEY

There is no such thing as a drug that has no side effects. When looking at infomercials, we often see them advertising some drug. At the end of the commercial, we often hear in a very fast voice, the side effects that they, by law, have to tell you come along with taking the drug. I sometimes hear the side effects and wonder if it is worth taking the drug. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will see that sin always has negative side effects and consequences; and we will also see a God who addresses these things through the prophet Ezekiel. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have begun a five-part series on the book of Ezekiel. We started a five-part series and this is episode two of that. In the first episode, we talked about the magnificent vision that Ezekiel got from God, and that the message he was supposed to receive, he was actually mind-blown and overwhelmed by.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and now, in this episode, we are going to see that he doesn't say a lot in the next chapters either, but what he does do is he acts out a lot of stuff. He speaks through a series of frankly very odd actions that God asks him to do.

You know, Darrell, the prophets had to do weird things sometimes. I think, was it Hosea who was asked to marry a prostitute at one point...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Gomer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He also was told to strip naked and howl like a jackal. Jeremiah was once told to bury his underwear for some reason. So, prophets were sometimes asked to do odd things; but Ezekiel takes the cake.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, because most of the messages that are in the first part of this book, he literally gives a visual sign to Israel on what the word is; and so, we see here in Chapter 4 where God is speaking to him, he tells him exactly what to do, and Ezekiel obeys it. It says: "Now, son of man, take a block of clay, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. ²Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it. ³Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the people of Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁴Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. ⁵I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their

sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the people of Israel. ⁶After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the people of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year. ⁷Turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and with bared arm prophesy against her. ⁸I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your siege.”

DARRELL DELANEY

Israel has gone so far down the road of rebellion that God is literally pulling out all the stops to get them to understand the radical seriousness of their sin and what will happen because of it. We have been saying Israel, and we also interchange it with Judah because Israel is the blanket term for every one of the believers that were under God’s covenant, but Judah is specifically the region in which Ezekiel was called to; and at the fall of 586 BC when Babylon takes over, it happens right in the middle of Ezekiel’s service of ministry to God. So, don’t be surprised if you hear us interchanging Israel and Judah during the whole conversation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And clearly, Jerusalem is at the center of this task, so we know Jerusalem was the capital of the unified Israel under David and Solomon, and then remained the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah; but what a strange thing. I mean, when I read this passage, I think if only Ezekiel had had Legos, you know. I mean, he could have done this whole thing with Legos. Because it looks like a kid playing with Legos: Draw a city and the build little siege ramps and then put an iron pan... It is all very, very odd; and you know, the text says he did it, so I guess we will take it seriously and literally, but this meant that he laid there for over a year!

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, if he literally...unless these numbers are symbolic and, you know...but otherwise, for 390 days and then 40 more days. So, 430 days he was supposed to lay on his left side and his right side as a symbol of sin. I mean, you almost have to wonder, did this message get through to anybody? Is anybody going to pay attention to somebody laying in front of his Lego set for a year?! Very, very, very odd way to get things done, but it shows the seriousness with which God has been tracking the sin of all of Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Four hundred thirty days for 430 years in captivity; and a lot of people might wonder: Is God taking it too far? Well, I look at it this way, Scott, that God is the creator of all things, and he loves all that he created; and it was a relationship with the people where he would be their God and they would be his people; and that it would be a wonderful relationship, but then they failed to keep the promise of the covenant that they said they would keep in Deuteronomy; and the idea is very simple: If you obey you are blessed and if you disobey you are cursed; and all these nations will come in and draw you into exile. That is literally in Deuteronomy 28, and they broke the covenant when they disobeyed; and now God is saying: Hey, you actually brought these actions on yourself. There are consequences for sin, and because God is holy, he must judge it. It is really heartbreaking because it could have gone another way if the people made better decisions, but it also shows the limitations of our own humanity. We cannot be perfect; we cannot do it perfectly in any way; so, it is really sad, but God has to address this because he is holy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You use the term *heartbreaking*, and I think that is just right, Darrell, because in the Bible, God is never, ever a fundamentally angry God. That is not... I mean, there were some Greek gods and some Roman gods who were just angry, you know. What is Zeus like? Oh, he’s angry. He is hacked off all the time and throwing lightning bolts. That is not the God of Israel or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he is...as you said...he is holy and he is loving; and he cannot let injustice go. He cannot let sin and evil go. He cannot just bat it away like it is no big deal; like it is just an annoying little mosquito. No; he is heartbroken over

this; and that reminds me, too, of the story of Noah and the ark, Darrell, in Genesis.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, not once in the Genesis flood story is God said to be angered. You know, it says he is grieved...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was grieved that people had gone this far from his intentions; and that is what you get with Israel. He is grieved. His anger is love offended—holiness offended.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful that you mention that because God has entered into this suffering relationship with his people, and he does all he can to communicate to them that they have sinned; and he uses Ezekiel as that message. He demonstrates the message and he continues to walk it out visually; but in just a minute, we are going to get into another section where God communicates through Ezekiel. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are looking, in this program, Darrell, at the fact that Ezekiel doesn't have a lot to say initially in this book, but he has a lot to do; and we just saw the rather odd task that Ezekiel in Chapter 4 had to build a little model of Jerusalem and then pretend like he is laying siege to it, and then he had to lay next to it for about a year to symbolize the sins of the people of Israel. So, that was odd; but wait, there is more, as they say on TV. Let's jump to Ezekiel Chapter 5.

DARRELL DELANEY

"Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. ²When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. ³But take a few hairs and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. ⁴Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to all Israel. ⁵This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. ⁶Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees."

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you. ⁸Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations."

So now, Darrell, we have gone from this little model of the city to kind of a barbershop, and we've got hair dividing into thirds and we are burning some, we are scattering some, we are smashing some, and we are saving some. Again, if you lived next door to Ezekiel you would have to wonder who this guy was.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it would be a little strange if you saw a different scene every day of something different that he was doing. All of this is to illustrate one point, that God is outraged by the actions of his people. Just picture it as a marital situation, where one spouse has been unfaithful and then the other spouse becomes heartbroken, angry, jealous, frustrated, disappointed, sad, grieving. That is what is happening in God's heart; and this is the holy God that is going to have to do something to restore his people because they literally cannot stop themselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we will talk a little bit, too, that even in this odd haircut scene, the fact that God tells him to save a few hairs...

DARRELL DELANEY

That is grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is grace. There is going to be a remnant. That is a little hint, but God is not going to make a big deal of that here; it is mostly a judgment passage; but there is that little bit of grace that not all of the hair is going to get burned and scattered to the four winds; there will be a remnant; but what is interesting here, Darrell, is what God says. God says: You were the chosen people. You were supposed to do it better than anybody; and not only did you not do it better, you have actually been worse than some of the nations around you. There are some of the nations around you who don't know me, who was not my chosen nation, and they treat their poor better than you do. So, it is a double whammy here. I mean, not only did you not live up to who I wanted you to be as a chosen people, you were worse than some of the unchosen ones.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the actions that they have really appalling to God for that reason. They were supposed to be a light to the nations, that the salvation would reach the ends of the earth. That is Isaiah 49; but it reminds me also of *Star Wars* episode 3 when Obi-Wan Kenobi shouts to Anikan: You were the chosen one. You were supposed to destroy the Sith, not join them; and we see the people of Israel going further than the people who do not know God, as if they don't know God. They are leading the people in the wrong direction, and that is literally what breaks God's heart and frustrates him, and the way Ezekiel displays these messages is they literally cannot be ignored by the people because he is doing them in the public square. He is doing them in front of them, and their actions and sins have been public, so Ezekiel's message is public.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly, you probably made a lot of *Star Wars* fans happy there with that reference, but right; in that saga, the chosen one, they thought he was going to help, but in the end, he makes things worse because he joins the enemy; and that is sort of what God says here. As you just said, you were to be my beachhead. That is what he said to Abraham, way back in Genesis 12: I am going to start with you so that through you I can save everybody else. And now God says this isn't working. I am not going to be able to save anybody through you because you are *worse* than some of the other people. You may as well have joined the enemy because this isn't working at all. Again, as we said in the previous segment, it is divine heartbreak, it is grief, even for God, a level, I think, Darrell...I mean, we sometimes think God cannot be surprised, but yet, there is a sense that even God is surprised at how bad they have turned out to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

I never really thought about how Ezekiel might have felt about all of this. I mean, we see that he obeys God in everything that he does, but there is a place where he does protest when God asks him to use human

excrement for fuel to cook his food, and he protests; but then, other than that, he literally does what God tells him to do, and it is really a situation where he wants to be obedient, but he wanted to show how disgusting those actions were to him in his sight as far as holiness of the character of God. When God sees Israel sinning, it is disgusting to him like that visual aid that he was going to give him to do.

I have also noticed, too, Scott, that there are people who glamorize prophesy and prophets and prophetesses. In the world that I live in, there are people who want those monikers—those titles; but if they saw all the things and were called to do the things Ezekiel was called to do, then I don't think they would be running to the popular...they think it is fame, they think it is status...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But it is not. That is the complete opposite for Ezekiel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you shoot the messenger, right? All through history we have shot the messengers, and that is what Jesus is going to say, you know; when Jesus comes later, he will give that one parable about the tenants in the vineyard, you know: I kept sending you prophets and you kept killing them, and eventually you killed the son when I sent my own son, which is Jesus himself. The prophets were always roughed up. It is like Elijah...you know, Elijah in his day spoke the truth...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what did King Ahab call him?

DARRELL DELANEY

The troubler of Israel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The troubler of Israel. We blame you. But that is just what God said that we looked at in the previous program, Darrell. In Chapter 2 and 3, God said: Look, Israel is a rebellious house. "A rebellious house", we said, was like a broken record: Did I mention they are rebellious? They are not going to listen; and indeed, they didn't, any more than, ultimately, we did when Jesus himself finally came. After all the prophets were rejected, finally God sent the Son, and the religious establishment didn't listen to him either. But we do want to talk a little bit more about this whole prospect of the exile. The people have already been sort of exiled from their home cities, but they are going to have more exile to come. So, we want to look at that message, but also how some hope gets in there. So, we will wrap up the program with that in just a moment. Stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you have been listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, we have been looking at how God has used Ezekiel as a visual aid to get his word across to the people; and he has done that in a public fashion, where everyone can see it, because for years they have been rebelling and not following God's law, and they have done that in a very public way and influenced the other nations around them negatively. Ezekiel is showing that God is not happy about it. We are not going to go into this, but there are other chapters in between the chapter that we studied just before, Chapters 4 and 5, but there are more of these words and there are more of these prophecies where God is saying: Hey, you need to do this, you need to do that; and Ezekiel has to follow it; and then Chapter 7 has an actual word that he wants him to say against the people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; yes, because we are going to jump ahead to Chapter 12. We should say that Ezekiel is a very big book. So, even though we have a five-part series here on *Groundwork*, we are not going to be able to hit everything, and we encourage you to read those intervening chapters to see what else God asked Ezekiel to do. But let's jump ahead now to Chapter 12, where Ezekiel once again has an acted-out message...almost an acted-out parable...that he has to perform before the people.

DARRELL DELANEY

The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people. ³Therefore, son of man, pack your belongings for exile and in the daytime, as they watch, set out and go from where you are to another place. Perhaps they will understand, though, they are a rebellious people. ⁴During the daytime, while they watch, bring out your belongings packed for exile. Then in the evening, while they are watching, go out like those who go into exile. ⁵While they watch, dig through the wall and take your belongings out through it. ⁶Put them on your shoulder as they are watching and carry them out at dusk. Cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have made you a sign to the Israelites.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷So I did as I was commanded. During the day I brought out my things packed for exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands. I took my belongings out at dusk, carrying them on my shoulders while they watched. ⁸In the morning, the word of the Lord came to me: ⁹“Son of man, did not the Israelites, that rebellious people, ask you, ‘What are you doing?’ ¹⁰Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This prophecy concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the Israelites who are there.’ ¹¹Say to them, ‘I am a sign to you.’ As I have done, so it will be done to them. They will go into exile as captives.” So, Ezekiel...they are already a captive people...they are already de facto exile, but they are not totally in Babylon at this point, and so he is symbolizing that guess what, people of Israel? A road trip is coming, and not a good one.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, pack your stuff because we are going into exile.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the visual image of him packing was not the news Judah wanted to hear...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nope.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because we are the people of God, remember? We are his chosen people. Nothing is going to happen to us. But they didn't realize that there are consequences for those sinful actions. They didn't believe it until it actually happened. Isn't it interesting, Scott, that we don't always believe there are consequences for our actions? I mean, we just think that sometimes God will just overlook things and not judge it or not pay attention; but we do serve a God who is paying attention to those things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Israel, unfortunately, had decades...centuries...

DARRELL DELANEY

Centuries.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Really, of practice in self-deception, in saying God doesn't see. He cannot see us. He is not watching. Anyway, as long as we go to the temple on the Sabbath and sing our songs, all is forgiven, right? Just show up to the temple and say: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. Yeeha; praise God; and now tomorrow we can go back to our shady business and he won't notice. They were well practiced in the arts of self-deception; but God cannot let that go because God is not deceived...God is not mocked...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As Paul will say in the New Testament. And God is holy. This is what he said already in Leviticus. Why all those careful preparations for the temple and the camp. A holy God cannot stick around with an unholy people. It is just impossible.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the attribute that Isaiah in his call illuminates with the angels. They are crying: Holy, holy, holy. They are not crying: Righteous. They are not crying: Loving. They are not crying: Gracious. They are crying: Holy. And the fact that that is repeated in the Scripture means that that is a very important character of God. He sees sin, he sees blemish, he sees that and he has to judge it. That is his call—that is his character. If we had a bad judge, then we would see: Okay, he overlooked it, but we consider a judge a good judge because they do their job, and his job is to judge sin; but the second thing is that he is a loving God. You mentioned this earlier, Scott, where he enters into a suffering relationship with his people. He knows it is going to cost him; he knows he is going to take one on the chin, but he still does it because he loves his people. He enters into covenant with them knowing they are going to break it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he ultimately...because God so loved the world...to quote a verse that most of us know...he will send his only Son to rescue us ultimately from the very degradation and unholiness that Israel represented, and that runs through all of our hearts unfortunately. We all need that redeemer, because I think, you know, Darrell...so, the people are going to go into exile, but there is a sense in which we are all in exile, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

None of us are home, right? You know, in the Heidelberg Catechism, the first section of the Heidelberg Catechism—a Reformed document—is called Misery; but a lot of people don't feel miserable, even people who aren't Christian...who aren't believers...they don't feel miserable, but the Heidelberg Catechism says they are; but in the original German, that section is titled *Elend* which is from the Latin for ex land—*exile*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you can be miserable without knowing it because you are living apart from God. You are exiled from God, and that is our core problem as sinful human beings.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that is the definition of being lost. You don't know where you are and you don't know how far from home you are; and the world is broken because it offers these false promises of identity, of status, of worth; a purpose that never fully delivers, Scott; and it is really disappointing if you spend your whole life climbing the corporate ladder and you realize there is nothing up there that is going to be ultimately eternally fulfilling for you. Even though those things can be good deeds, they false promise, and that is the issue with exile. You are never going to get it from the pleasures; you are never going to get it from the party, the sex, the drugs; any of those things. And we kind of know that, but we still pursue them anyway, thinking that we have to have some hope, but it is not real hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Our hearts are restless until they rest in God, the famous theologian, St. Augustine once said, because yes, Darrell, you are right. People grasp for all those things because somewhere deep down they do know they are not quite home—they are not quite where they need to be. That is the message of Ezekiel for Israel. Ultimately he says: You are far, far from God; but as we will see in future programs on this, God is not going to leave it at that. God is going to promise a way home. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the departure of God's glory and the consequences of Israel's rebellion in Ezekiel Chapters 10 and 11. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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