

Faith in the Fire

DARRELL DELANEY

How do you hold your resolve in the midst of daunting opposition? What if your life was on the line? Do you think that you could hold onto your resolve? What if you had the reassurance of the Lord helping you, strengthening you, and protecting you; could you hold on then? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will delve into the third chapter of Daniel, where we will see unshakable faith and sacrifice against all odds, and the Lord given the glory in the midst of it all. 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 are in the third part of our six-part series on the book of Daniel, and we have been covering a lot of things here. We learned in the first episode that God is completely sovereign over all things, even less than ideal circumstances; and he also gave Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael the ability to thrive and excel in less than ideal situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we are in the time of the exile in Babylon, and we focused principally on the character of Daniel, but we also have those three friends. So, we are going to be looking at those three friends and *not* Daniel in this particular episode. In the previous episode—the second one—we also saw Chapters 2 and 4. Both dealt with dreams that Nebuchadnezzar had, and that only Daniel could interpret. So, we looked at Chapters 1, 2 and 4; now we are just going to go to that one that we skipped over for the moment, and that will be Chapter 3, where we get a well-known story...one of the better-known stories of the book of Daniel...involving Nebuchadnezzar and his attempt to make all people worship him as like a god.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, King Nebuchadnezzar...of course, you mentioned this and I mentioned this in the previous episodes...is that he often has where he exalts himself and then he recognizes that the true God is the living God due to Daniel interpreting dreams or to God doing something miraculous; and he comes to his senses, and it looks like at the end of the chapter he says: Okay, the true and living God...he is the God; but then, the beginning of the next chapter, he seems to have forgotten that and he is back on thinking about trying to exalt himself. In the beginning of this chapter, he is doing that; and we realize that when Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, or Daniel, decide not to do what the king tells them to do, it is because they want to continue in their devotion and faithfulness to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Nebuchadnezzar is definitely kind of a shampoo, rinse, repeat kind of guy, because he just keeps forgetting. Every time we turn to a new chapter, all the great things he said about Israel's God at the end of the previous chapter are just like gone.

We should also mention, by that way, Darrell, that Daniel is Daniel's Hebrew name. Now, he was given a Babylonian name, called Belteshazzar, but we know him most by Daniel. His three friends are somehow better known by their Babylonian given names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. We will kind of use those interchangeably in this program,

where we begin in Chapter 3 with a situation getting set up that is going to bring a lot of conflict.

So let's listen to what happens here:

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. (So, all those people come, and they came for the dedication.)⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." ⁷Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And he has indeed set something up.

DARRELL DELANEY

Can you see how this setup could be a problem, Scott, for these three guys? Their original heart and devotion to God; they have been trained up since they were small children about the law that Moses had given and the Torah and these things that tell them: No other gods should come before the true and living God. It is in God's top ten; the Ten Commandments, and they want to live that way; and if they do, and they cannot worship this idol image...this golden image that has been set up; and sometimes our faith can cause problems. Even when we are not looking for trouble, trouble will sometimes find us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; the situation is clear. They are going to have to either choose to participate in idol worship or stay true to the God of Israel, which they have already been doing. We saw this in the opening chapter. They refused to eat the king's food, right? They turned out to be healthier than the people who did eat the king's food...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, there is again another situation where Nebuchadnezzar says: Wow; your God is great! But now, he is back to thinking he is a god. The world is always kind of trying to make us go along to get along, Darrell. We are getting pressured to laugh at dirty jokes, or we are pressured to go to parties where drugs and booze flow way, way, way too freely. We are tempted to compromise our faith and reprioritize our lives just so we fit in better. That is what is happening here, and it happens to us, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and the world is always trying to get us to compromise our faith in some way. You are shining your light a little too bright, Scott. You have one hundred watts; could you bring it down to sixty watts so everyone can feel comfortable here? Because you are shining a little too bright. Even though the Lord tells us to shine our light, there are some people who may not like that; and so, we have to constantly ask God for his strength to choose to not compromise, even if it has physical consequences, or you know, damaging things that could happen to us. I am thinking about how martyrs have happened all over in history of the faith; and how there were people who were murdered for their faith because they decided not to give up Jesus and not to give up their faith, and this chapter is setting up that they could die if they choose not to go along to get along.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, in these seven verses that we have read so far from Daniel 3, we haven't even gotten to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, or Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael; but we know it is coming...we know

what is next even before we get to what is next, which we will in just a few moments in this program; but we know what is next. We know what the temptation is going to be. We know Jesus talked about this in the New Testament: What good does it do you if you gain the whole world but forfeit your soul?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You give up your soul...you give up your integrity; what can you use to buy it back, Jesus says. Nothing, right? That is the situation we often find ourselves in. We can gain the whole world...we can gain the approval of the whole world...but if doing that means compromising our loyalty to God, and in our New Testament context, our loyalty and fidelity to Jesus above all, then we have lost everything.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Jesus also talks about you are the salt of the earth and if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? These guys, even way before Jesus was born, understood that if they worshipped this golden image, that they would lose their saltiness...they would lose their testimony...they would lose their integrity...and they did not want to do that; but they also needed God's help to actually have the strength to say "no" where the world is saying "yes"; and in a minute, we are going to talk about what happens in this story when they refuse to compromise. 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 in Daniel Chapter 3, and we have just seen that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up a giant golden statue and demanded that the whole world bow down and worship before it; and we have been saying, Darrell, we've got these friends of Daniel's: Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael, also known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; and we just know they are not going to go along with it, and we are going to find that out.

DARRELL DELANEY

Verse 8 of Chapter 3. It says: At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! ¹⁰Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all sorts of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹²But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." ¹³Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is; and we see that there are always some people to stir the pot. Here, we've got some astrologers who come forward to denounce the Jews. It looks like maybe Nebuchadnezzar is not aware that these three people, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, aren't bowing down; so, they point it out. Who knows, you know, why that kind of thing happens. I think from the human side, Darrell, we can probably figure out some people do this kind of thing to curry favor with the king, right? You bring the king the news of something he needs to know about and you will get rewarded. So, they are kind of, you know, trying to make nice with the king and get in favor with him; and if some innocent people get hurt, oh, well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the Bible is strangely silent, Scott, about why they are doing it. What is their motive? What is behind it? The writer knows that these things happen, and I think as believers...I am not trying to make this a one-for-one allegorical thing, but we do need to think about the fact that there will be people who will say what they will say and do what they will do, and there is nothing the Christian can do about that. We have to control what we can control, which is our response and how we live in that situation. I think another thing that is interesting is that we have this king who is angry because someone is showing "insubordination" in his kingdom. He has exalted Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael to these positions to be in charge of things, and he will not hesitate to cut them down if they are disobedient to him. His reputation is on the line; his hubris is on the line; his pride is on the line; and because Babylon is a big kingdom, he probably doesn't micromanage all of this, but when he gets word, he is really upset, because once a king makes a decree, they cannot change it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and he is arrogant. He is angry, he is deluded; but in the verses we just read, at the end of verse 15, you've got to give Nebuchadnezzar credit. He asks the right question. He says to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you know, if you don't bow down, I am throwing you into the furnace, and then he says: *Then* what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?! Well, good question—very good question; and you are going to get an answer before this story is finished; and we all know what that answer is going to be. He has now spoken, but now let's hear, beginning at verse 16 of Daniel 3, what they say.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." So, yes; they don't hold back!

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that the king expected them to kind of fold under the pressure here. I am the king; I will throw you in the fiery furnace. It is really hot. Take a look at it. We are going to throw you in there, and you need to, right now, do what I told you to do; and then, he doesn't expect them to disobey him twice. The first one was kind of over in another district or something, but this one was literally in his face, and he thought that he had the power to change their minds; but their devotion to God and their love for God superseded any consequence that this human could give to them; and I think that is a note for us as believers, that we need to remember who is in control of everything. We need to actually trust in the God who can deliver us and save us no matter what the pressure is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you don't know, in reading this story...you wonder, though...has God tipped them off? Did God actually send them a message somehow that, hey, you know, even if you get thrown in the furnace, I will get you out of it. Their confidence in God, their faith in God, their ultimate belief that God will ultimately stay with them, of course that is right; but there have been faithful people who stood their ground for God and did die...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, God has not delivered every martyr from their martyrdom in the history of Israel or the Church. So, they are awfully confident here that they are going to walk out of that fiery furnace. So, did God, you know, tip them off? Don't know; but again, their stalwartness—their pluck, you know: We don't need to defend ourselves in front of you

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that line.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We don't need...no; we are not going to defend ourselves. And indeed, you know, when you know you're right, do you need to waste your breath defending it in front of people who don't believe in your God, who don't believe in your faith, who think that, you know, you are just making stuff up? If we really trust God is sovereign, if we really trust the Holy Spirit is with us, then maybe, you know...some of the times when we try to defend ourselves and construct clever arguments to defend our faith...maybe we don't need to do that. They certainly don't do it here.

DARRELL DELANEY

They didn't do it here because they have in their memory in the pages of the Torah, the book of Exodus, where Moses and the people are right here at the Red Sea and Pharaoh is coming and all the armies, and the verse says: Exodus 14:13, ¹⁴Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord... for the Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. I think that verse is one of the things that could have been, I imagine, in their minds; and they not needing to defend themselves in this matter, because the Lord is their defense. He is a shield; he is a buckler; it is all over the Psalms that he is a protector; and we need to remember that God is in our corner in places where there is much opposition. It looks like these guys are in a whole bunch of trouble, and we are going to focus on the redemption part of the story real soon. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this third episode in a six-part series on the book of Daniel; and we are in Daniel Chapter 3 and the well-known story of the blazing furnace and of Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego, or their Hebrew names, Hananiah, Azariah and Misheal; and we have just seen that they were summoned before the king, who said: I have given an order that I set up this big gold statue of myself, and when you hear certain music being played, you are supposed to bow down. You aren't doing it. You will do it or I will throw you into the furnace, and then, what god could help you? And they have replied, saying: Our God can help us; and our God will. We are not going to argue about this with you, and we are not going to bow down. So, that is where we are.

DARRELL DELANEY

And then we read this part that picks up in verse 19, where it says: Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²²The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." ²⁵He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth look like a son of the gods."

Man, that is one of my favorite parts to this passage, Scott. It is really powerful to see, even though King Nebuchadnezzar is angry about them refusing to follow his orders, and then they get thrown into the furnace, there is someone else in the fire.

SCOTT HOEZEE

An amazing story. Indeed, you know, the poor soldiers who had to get close enough to drop these three into the fire, they themselves...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Burst into flames; that is how hot it was. Really, really a horrible, horrible thing. I don't quite know what the setup was. I remember in some Sunday school story it was like the furnace had a little window on it or something, you know, and Nebuchadnezzar could look in. I don't know...I don't know how he could see into the fire. He couldn't have been terribly close to it himself, it was that hot; but when he *did* look in, he expected to see nothing, right? I mean, three soldiers have already been consumed on the lip of this thing...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego should have been burned up, ropes tied around them and all, within seconds. So, he didn't expect to see anything. He certainly didn't expect to see those three walking around, fine, no more ropes tying them up; and he certainly did not expect to see a guest showing up, who looked like "a son of the gods," he says. It is almost funny. He cannot believe his eyes. You can just see the look on his face. What is going on here?!

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what *is* going on here? Many scholars have said that this is the preincarnate Christ. Before the incarnation, before Matthew, before the New Testament, Christ shows up as Undercover Boss, if you will, in the Old Testament. He shows up at the burning bush; he shows up as one of the soldiers in the book of Joshua that has a sword drawn out. They say: Are you for us or against us? He says: Neither. It could be the wrestling angel, the one who goes with Israel in the book of Genesis, but Jesus shows up in the Old Testament as the preincarnate Christ, and this is one of those moments. He is in the fire with them; and I am a preacher, so that actually will preach to me that if you are in a fiery situation and you are feeling discouraged or overwhelmed, the Son of Man—the Lord Jesus Christ—is willing to jump into your fiery situation with you, and you can find ways to rejoice, even when it is getting hot. That is something that really is encouraging for me to know, and for me to live out as a Christian.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as New Testament people, you almost want to say to Nebuchadnezzar: You said he looks like the son of the gods...or the Son of God...funny you should put it that way...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have a savior with that title a little later in the Bible; but indeed, God is with them in the fire, literally. You know, there are those verses in Isaiah that you will pass through the fire but not be burned. Well, here is a literal occasion whereby an incredible miracle of God...these three are protected. They knew...they said: God will protect us. You know, Nebuchadnezzar asked: What god could help you? Well, he has just found out. Israel's God can help them.

So, now we continue in verse 26:

Nebuchadnezzar approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So (they) came out of the fire ²⁷and all the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched. (They didn’t even smell the fire on them!) ²⁸Then (and here goes Nebuchadnezzar again) “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.” ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego in the province of Babylon.

So, that is what you call a turn of events...

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the great reversal of this story. Now, if you don’t say good things about Israel’s God, *you* will get punished.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it sounds like King Nebuchadnezzar has finally gotten the picture here...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Until we get to Chapter 4, and then it is kind of, you know, shampoo, rinse, repeat; but anyway...

DARRELL DELANEY

He is doing it again...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He will do it again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Just a few takeaways from this section, Scott: I think it is important for us to know that as believers in this world we are the ones who love God, and not the world and the things in it. Like 1 John tells us to live, we will always be offered a compromise for our faith, or to kind of, like I said before, turn down the wattage of our light that God is calling us to shine that brings glory to him. Don’t fall for that, because the world is not in the best interest of the Lord. They are not doing God’s plan and they are not interested in bringing glory to him. We are Christians, and we are called to be ambassadors, and we are called to bring light to him and glory to him. It is going to be hard for us, but we need to have his strength to help us with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And when we are tempted to compromise...and we are, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were...if we stay steadfast to God, we know God will stay steadfast to us. Whatever the world might do to us...and yes, we might die...but as Jesus said: Even if you die, if you believe in me, you will live; because I am the resurrection and the life; and indeed, God does stay with us through the fire we face...the metaphorical fire...maybe something akin to literal fire...but God is always there, and that is the great encouragement we take away from this story in Daniel 3. Thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney, and we hope you will join us again next time as we read the story of the writing on the wall in Daniel Chapter 5.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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Printed on September 9, 2025