
God is in Charge, Now and Forever

SCOTT HOEZEE

Probably there is not a human alive who has not had strange dreams at night. Sometimes they are comical, like those dreams we have of people we know but who are wearing weird and outrageous clothing, or doing things we have never actually seen them do, like singing solos in a musical. Other times, our dreams can be terrifying, and we reserve the term “nightmare” for dreams in which someone jumps at us from behind our bedroom door, or some weird animal comes charging at us from out of a dark forest. As the book of Daniel concludes, Daniel has one strange and apocalyptic dream after the next; and although in the first part of this book, Daniel was good at interpreting dreams, in the latter half of the book, Daniel needs God to do the interpreting for him. Today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into some of that. So, stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are in the final episode of our six-part series on the Old Testament book of Daniel; and we have seen in this series that the first half of Daniel—Chapters 1 through 6—contain six memorable stories involving Daniel and his three friends, and dreams of Nebuchadnezzar; but now, as we move into Chapter 7 and beyond, the character of this book changes a lot.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it does, Scott. In the first half of the book, we have these narratives where there is a dream or there is an incident where they are challenged in their faith...Daniel and his three friends...and then the king or whoever is in power has an issue; there is like a struggle there; but then, they are being delivered. In between those, you have these dreams happening, where Daniel is interpreting the dreams; and as you said in the intro, Daniel has no problem interpreting the dreams, it seems, in the first half of this book; but in this section of the book, it gets a little bit more complicated with a lot more symbolism; and a lot of people call it apocalyptic literature. Maybe you can tell them what that means.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, Daniel is prophetic and apocalyptic at the same time in the final six chapters. It is like the biblical book of Revelation, which is also in the genre, as we say, or the literary category of apocalyptic. *Apocalyptic* literally means that which is revealed: the apocalypse, which is the Greek name of the book of Revelation, means the revealing. That is why we call it Revelation; and the other hallmark of apocalyptic literature is, as you just said, Darrell, all the symbolism—weird symbolism—odd symbolism—bewildering symbolism; and, we are going to see this, lots and lots of numbers: strange talk about a time, times and a half time. This stuff is really hard to understand; and Daniel is really good at interpreting other people’s dreams; his own, not so much, because he is going to have some dreams here where he comes back to God and says: Huh?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What does that mean?! It is a question anybody reading this would ask.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, let's look at it in Daniel Chapter 7, at the beginning of these dreams; and it starts in verse 1, where it says: In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. ²Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ³Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. ⁴The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it. ⁵And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' ⁶After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. ⁷After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful! It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is in Daniel 7. This is only one of the many dreams that we get in Daniel Chapters 7 through 12, but this is enough to get the idea. This is weird. This is odd, beyond most of our average, bizarre dreams, and Daniel doesn't know what they mean. In Chapters 8 and 10 and 11, he is going to have other dreams about a terrifying looking ram and goat with lots of horns on it. He is going to see some vision of a powerful man. He is going to have a vision of an angelic being identified as Michael; and in every case, Daniel is just bewildered by these dreams; and you know, who could blame him; and he has to ask God what they mean. It would take hours to hash through all that symbolism, but they all come down to pretty much the same thing, Darrell: Daniel is being given visions of the times to come in history, and some idea of the end times of all history; but several times when Daniel asks God for the interpretation, he gets all these strange numbers.

DARRELL DELANEY

And this is an example of that, when Daniel asks the question of what this means, he gets an answer in Chapter 8, and it starts like this. It says: ¹⁴He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

Chapter 12:6b: "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" ⁷The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. ¹¹From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹²Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."

SCOTT HOEZEE

All right; so, we jumped around a little bit there in Chapters 8 and 12; 2,300 evenings; 1,290 days; 1,335 days; a time, times, and half a time. Probably it will surprise no one that in Church history a small cottage industry has arisen that tried to connect all those numbers with actual calendar dates, even as people have tried to connect the various rulers and creatures with actual historical figures; and I think, Darrell, in the history of the Church, everybody from Alexander the Great to Attila the Hun to Mikhail Gorbachev have been named as the people to whom the dreams point; but probably, that is the wrong approach to this kind of apocalyptic symbolism and numerology and numbers. Yes, in the near term, there are solid reasons to see some of these predictions as applying to the downfall of Babylon and the rise of Persia. In the long term, though, it is sort of like what we have said about the book of Revelation when we did a *Groundwork* series on Revelation, it points to the repeated pattern of history to come.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I was in biblical interpretation class in college, we had a class that helped us understand the different genres in scripture; and what we learned is that the apocalyptic visions that are in Revelation, and also in this book, are not to be taken literally.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are not supposed to be trying to add up the numbers and find out specifically where in history this is happening. We are supposed to be understanding the symbolism and the meaning that goes *behind* this apocalyptic literature; and ultimately, if we remember the main thing that we have been talking about this whole series, is that God is in sovereign control of all of history, then we can see this message, not as a frightening one, but as one of hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Daniel is told this is going to keep happening, right? People are going to keep coming up with kingdoms that *they* think are going to be forever. So, in New Testament times, during the Roman Empire, the city of Rome was referred to as the Eternal City; hmmm. In the 20th Century, Adolf Hitler depicted the Nazi regime, the Third Reich, and he said it would last a thousand years! He was only off by 990 years, by the way, in that. So, we are going to keep fancying our kingdoms as eternal, but as you just said, Darrell, there is only one eternal kingdom, and that is the one that God builds, and the one that we now know as the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, don't lose track of the central message in this blizzard of creatures and details and symbolism and numbers. They all come down to the same thing: God is in charge. Only God's kingdom will last, and that is the message of all the dreams with which the book of Daniel concludes. But in just a moment, Darrell, there is one chapter in those last six chapters that is a little bit different. It is Daniel 9, and we are going to get to it in just a moment, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we have just noted, Darrell, whereas the first six chapters of Daniel tell us a series of wonderful stories full of memorable details and suspense, the final six turn toward strange and hard to understand apocalyptic symbolism and numbers; but right in the middle of all that, Darrell, is Daniel 9, and it is a prayer.

DARRELL DELANEY

⁴I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to the people of the land. ⁷Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. ⁸We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you."

He is confessing right now. He is understanding the brokenness that they found themselves in...why he is even in exile. He is acknowledging the fact that they were in sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Why are we sitting here in Babylon? Why are we in exile? Is it because God failed? Uh, no; we did! So, Daniel is collectively confessing the long history of their sinfulness, of their covenant *unfaithfulness* that landed them in a situation that, at the end of the day, Daniel says: We got our comeuppance; we got exactly what we deserved by being put here; and indeed, Darrell, we can look at the history of Israel and fill in the background behind Daniel's words here. For instance, in Deuteronomy, before the people took the land of Canaan, God directly told them: Destroy all the remnants of Canaanite religion; get rid of it; all the altars to Baal and Ashera, get rid of it. Did they? No. And so, you know, eventually we saw a very famous story about the prophet Elijah on that showdown on Mount Carmel, and who was Elijah battling against? The prophets of Baal! Oh, my goodness; do you know what that means, Darrell? Israel had prophets of Baal in it. They let God down. They did not get rid of Canaanite religion.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think one of the things that is most frustrating for God in this situation is that he gives specific instructions; and when Israel does not completely follow those instructions, there are consequences to that situation. I mean, when our parents give us these rules, and they want us to do chores or whatnot, they expect us to follow the instructions to the letter, and if we don't...if we fudge on it or if we do things that we think are our way that we think are shortcuts, when they come back and inspect it and it is not satisfactory, there is an issue there; that is exactly what happened with God, who is holy and spotless and perfect, he wanted Israel to live a certain way, and now they are reaping the consequences of that, but they also did things that were kind of like the oppressors that they came from, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; again and again, in the law of God, God basically says: Do not do unto others as the Egyptians did unto you. Don't be oppressive, you know, of foreigners, like Egypt was with you. Take *extra* special care of the vulnerable among you: the poor, the orphan, the widow, the foreigner. Don't abuse them; and what do we get? They did abuse them. They exploited widows, they exploited orphans, they mistreated foreigners; and so, you get prophets like Amos and Micah, who come into Jerusalem...who come into Judah and Israel...and say: You are leading lives of injustice, which, you know, word-wise is very similar to righteousness: You are unrighteous. God is righteous, God is just; you are not. So, Daniel is saying: Yes, everything you asked us to do, if we didn't do the opposite, we came pretty close.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am not sure if anyone before Daniel has actually had a conversation with God to acknowledge the fact that they have done this wrong; that they need to confess this. After you see David do it in the Psalms, you don't really see it anywhere, but the first step of this prayer for Daniel is to acknowledge: We have sinned before a holy God; and then he goes into the second part of that, which is restoration that comes in the next part of this chapter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Verse 15: "Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. ¹⁶Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. ¹⁷Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

DARRELL DELANEY

Daniel is acknowledging, like you should in a prayer of repentance: We own it; we've done it; we did it; we actually were wrong; you were right when you judged us; and now we have understood the punishment and we want to make a turn toward righteousness, but we need your mercy to give us another chance. We have blown all our chances; we need you to restore us; and that is what Daniel is asking him to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a bold request, given the serious nature of the sins he also confessed; but you know, Darrell, we know this in our own lives. If we really are sorry for our sins...okay? If we genuinely pray a prayer of confession as Daniel did, then we want our relationship with God to get better. We don't just want to stay alienated. So, Daniel moves through confession to saying: But remember, God...remember? You are merciful. Your Word assures us that you are actually slow to anger. So, restore us; restore us, because we cannot be without you. We want to bear your name.

It reminds me of the psalms of lament, you know, where they lament God's absence; how slow he seems to act; but they keep hoping God still will act so that they can get back together with God. As Elie Wiesel, the famous writer and Holocaust survivor, once wrote: A Jew can be disappointed with God; a Jew can be angry with God; a Jew can be upset with God; but at the end of the day, a Jew cannot be without God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We need God back.

DARRELL DELANEY

We definitely need God back. So, what happens when we sin is that it is not our relationship that is broken, because we are connected to him, but it is our fellowship with him that has been broken; and Daniel acknowledges that the sin that they have done over this time has broken the relationship...fellowship with God; and they want that restored...Daniel wants that restored; and he actually needs the holy and just God to give him mercy in order to get back to that place; and so do we. We need God's mercy because we cannot earn our righteousness, we cannot earn the favor, and we need him to restore us, due to his righteousness and due to his grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You mentioned the Psalms a minute ago, Darrell. The number one reason Israel praised God again and again was for that untranslatable Hebrew word: *Chesed*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which sometimes is translated as lovingkindness or it is mercy or it is grace, but that was the core characteristic of God. He was kind; he was loving; he was disposed to forgive. Daniel leans into that here and says: Remember that that is who you are, God, and let us be restored.

So, that is a remarkable prayer in Daniel 9, but as we close out this series in a minute, Darrell, we are going to go to the last chapter of Daniel, 12; so, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we begin this final part of our six-part series on Daniel, let's go to Daniel 12. Daniel has had another dream and a vision that makes up most of these last six chapters. In verse 8 of Chapter 12: I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome be?"⁹ He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end."¹⁰ Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.¹¹ From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.¹² Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.¹³ As you go, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

DARRELL DELANEY

So Scott, have you ever had a teacher where you ask a question and they repeated the same answer to you? I feel like this is kind of what God is doing when he repeats these numbers. I don't think God is doing it to be frustrating or irritating. It is clear to God, because in all of his omniscient wisdom, he understands what is happening; but Daniel is left in a place of not really fully understanding what God is saying. He said that here in the passage. So, he is left in a place where he needs to just trust God at his word. Sometimes as believers, we don't have the full picture, but we need to trust God and believe that he will come to pass whatever he says he will do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are not going to get all the information, Daniel; but as you just said, Darrell...you know, I don't want to reduce a complex situation here to something that sounds a little too simple, but trust and obey. Ah, you don't know what all these numbers are. You don't know how it is all going to shake out or what is going to happen to the righteous...the wicked...but for you, just go on your way rejoicing. I will take care of you; I will take care of everybody; and you know, it is a good way for this book to end, because really, as we have seen. Darrell, what has emerged in all six of our programs on Daniel? God is large and in charge. God is sovereign, even in a situation where seeing that was not easy.

DARRELL DELANEY

We do have a track record of the earlier chapters in this book, where not only Daniel but the three Hebrew friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are putting their lives into the hands of God. They are entrusting their whole life to him; and whether they come out of the situation or not, they have committed to trusting him; and God doesn't want any of these numbers that may seem confusing, or any of these symbols that may seem overwhelming to Daniel's understanding, to stop him from continuing what he has been doing the whole time, which is trusting God and putting his life into the hands of God; and that is what us believers need to learn from this book, that there is a sovereign God who is in control of the situation, that we need to entrust our lives to, no matter what the ups and downs may be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All of this is taking place in exile; all of this is taking place while Daniel and friends are far from home, and where everything they knew...and this is reflected in Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9, that we looked at in the previous part of this program, Darrell...Jerusalem...the temple...their houses...their homes: Gone; wiped clean. It was all gone. They were in a time of complete disorientation; and you know, Darrell, it is not so different from our situation today. Does the news of the average day make it easy to see how in control Jesus is? You know, it reminds me of that first part of Hebrews Chapter 2, where the writer of Hebrews says: You know, God has put everything under Jesus' feet; but then he honestly goes on and says: But at present, we don't see everything subject to Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is like, I'll say. You know, in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, one of the key Reformation confessions, the first section of the Catechism is labeled *Misery*, and in the original German, that section was entitled *Elend*, from the Latin word ex-land—exile. We are all in exile. Daniel and his three friends were in exile; so are we. We are not fully at home with God like we wish we could be.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am so glad you mentioned that, and the book of Hebrews, because the book of Hebrews talks to the people who listen and write and read that book as aliens and strangers in this world, that the true rest is found in Jesus Christ; the true rest is not found in observing holidays or different locations. People are always...we are always going to be challenged not to put our trust in the things around us and these things that are temporary and in the things we achieve for ourselves. We are always going to be reminded to bring our trust back to the God who is in control of our destiny.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hebrews 11 listed all of the heroes of the faith, and then in verse 13: All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they were thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

DARRELL DELANEY

God, who is in control of all things, is thinking long term; he is thinking about the eternal kingdom that King Darius actually talked about in the previous chapter. So, we are serving a God who is looking at the long game and the eternal lasting place, and he gives us hope in this life, now, for that very kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, Hebrews 12, and this, I think, could sum up the whole book of Daniel: ¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is really beautiful that these words you just read, Scott, kind of sum up the fact that we need to put our trust in the God who is in control of all things. That is one of the prayers that I pray all the time. It keeps me peaceful; it keeps me grounded: You are in complete control of every situation, whether good or bad, or whether it has not even been going my way; you are the one that I can trust. And that is the God who is same yesterday, today and forever more that gives us power to not lose heart in these tough times. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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