
God is Sovereign Over All

SCOTT HOEZEE

Before the advent of showing photos on laptops and cell phones, people used to treat friends and family to slide shows. Using a projector with a circular carousel full of slides, the person running the show would click through one image after the next; but I have been to a slide show or two where the person who put the slides into the carousel was a bit haphazard about it. So, you might see a couple pictures from a summertime trip to Yellowstone, and the next thing you know, there are a couple Christmas pictures, followed by shots from a spring break trip to Chicago. The images just jumble together a bit. Well, the book of Daniel can be like that: stories appear episodically without much of a setup and with very little follow through in what comes next in the book. Today on *Groundwork*, we consider two seemingly random stories about some dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar. 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, this is program two of a six-part series on the Old Testament biblical book of Daniel, which as we noted in the first episode, the first part of Daniel is pretty familiar. It contains at least three pretty well-known stories. The second part of Daniel, that we will get to in this series, is less familiar—the more prophetic, apocalyptic parts of Daniel—but we know in the first episode we are in the period of the exile, in Babylon, and these early stories focus on the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who brings into his service four people: Daniel and his three friends, who come into the king's service; and we saw in the first episode how they served the king well, and yet stayed true to their true king of Yahweh. The next episode is going to be one of the better-known stories in Daniel, the story of the fiery furnace and how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to use their Babylonian given names, survived that; but that story, that we will get to next...in the next episode...is sandwiched between two chapters that we are going to look at today.

DARRELL DELANEY

The main character in this story is always going to be God, and he is sovereign over all things that are happening; nothing happens apart from his will, even the exile itself. God has a plan of redemption that includes it; and even though he doesn't cause it...it is caused by the disobedience of Israel...we found that out in the first episode...we see God still able to give favor to Daniel and his friends, and work in spite of the evil king, Nebuchadnezzar; and King Nebuchadnezzar is another main character in this section of the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he seems to be one of history's all-time slowest learners, Darrell, because it is like at the end of every chapter in the first part of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar learns something great about Israel's God, Yahweh, and he honors that God; and then you move to the next chapter, and it is like it is all gone. It is all erased, and all of sudden, Daniel and his friends are in danger again because the king is going to kill them. Sort of like, you know, wash, rinse, repeat with Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, at the end of Daniel 1, as we saw in the previous episode in this six-part series, Nebuchadnezzar says great things about Israel's God and promotes Daniel and

his three friends into his service, where they do really, really well; but one of the things we need to notice because it is going to figure into Chapter 2 here, is that the promotion Nebuchadnezzar gave Daniel and his friends was into a broader category that includes magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, and astrologers. That is sort of like the department...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In which Daniel and his...the Department of Sorcery...the Department of Enchantment...the Department of Astrology...that is where they work, and it is going to land them in trouble because of what comes next in Daniel 2.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's read it in Daniel Chapter 2. It starts and it says: In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ²So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." ⁴Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁵The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

So, it goes on to say: Listen, King Nebuchadnezzar is saying: You need to actually tell me the dream, because you are just going to tell me what I want to hear; you are just going to tell me what will keep you alive; but if I know you can tell me the dream *and* then what it means, I know that you are not going to scam me...you are not going to trick me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; for some reason, he gets wise to these astrologers and sorcerers, and he realizes: You know, I just threaten their lives. If they get this wrong, I am going to kill them. So, they are not going to risk getting it wrong; they are just going to tell me namby-pamby, gobbledygook stuff, and it going to be all generic and it is not going to be true; and so, he turns the tables on them and says: Okay, here is the deal: I not only want you to interpret my dream, first *you tell me* what my dream was, right? If you are so smart, you tell me; and they say: Oh, no, no; nobody...nobody...

¹⁰"...no one on earth can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they don't live among humans." ¹²This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³So the decree was issued to put wisemen to death, and the men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

Daniel and his friends were not the ones who appeared before the king, but they worked in that department...

DARRELL DELANEY

The same department.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the king decides he is going to purge the whole department and kill the lot of them.

DARRELL DELANEY

And unfortunately, because they are in that department, they are implicated in this. So, the king is so mad, he wants to wipe out the whole thing; and you know, it is interesting how he caught them in their deception, because if you can just generally tell me something, it might work. Like, you know, some days there are horoscopes...I don't read horoscopes...but horoscopes are so general, they really can read what you are

saying or what you are believing...but you give them meaning to it because of the generality of it, and then we think it is magical and it works; but that is what he was trying to avoid with these sorcerers. He wanted to have specific instructions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

While I was working on this program, I actually looked up a horoscope. So, here is a typical horoscope. I found this online: Some friends associated with a group you admire might take you to some kind of rally. This could be fun for you. You could make new friends.

Well, goodness; that is pretty general. I mean, you know, if somebody had said: I am going to tell you your horoscope: Today, your two co-workers, Joe and Larry, are going to take you to a Star Trek convention and you are going to have a lot of fun and you are going to make three new friends. Well, that is pretty specific, right? You are going to know whether that comes true or not. If Joe and Larry don't take you to a Star Trek convention and you don't make three new friends, you are going to say: Well, that is false! But, you know, look at all the wiggle language in the horoscope: some unnamed people associated with some unnamed group *might* take you to some kind...and it *could* be fun...you *could* make friends...that is what Nebuchadnezzar figured these guys were going to give him to save their necks, just generic stuff; and to head that off, he turns the tables and says: First tell me the dream and then interpret it. They cannot do it; and so, now, because he has decided to purge the whole department, Daniel and his friends are in danger of being murdered.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is important for us to know that Nebuchadnezzar is asking for a specific interpretation of his dream, and a specific explanation of the dream itself; and if that doesn't happen, then the whole department is going to be wiped out; and Daniel and his friends are implicated because they are in those departments...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we need to know that God is actually sovereign over this situation, so he has a way to figure this out; and when we go into the next segment, we will talk about how God is going to work this out in light of what Daniel needs to say. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Darrell, let's get right back into Daniel 2 to see what happens when the king's men come to kill Daniel and his three friends; and basically, just to sum it up, Daniel pleads for time. He says he will be able to interpret the dream. So, Daniel goes home, prays, falls asleep, and during the night God comes through again. As you said earlier, God is sovereign here. God gives Daniel all he needs to know. God shows Daniel what the king's dream is, and then what it means; and Daniel is so thankful in the morning, Darrell, that he composes a psalm right on the spot.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the psalm says: ²⁰“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. ²¹He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²²He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. ²³I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: you have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, a wonderful psalm. It is a doxological song to God—a doxology—because Daniel knows...and this is one of the things we are going to bring out in this episode, Darrell...Daniel knows it is all about God; it is all glory to God all the time; but after he does that psalm, he does go to the king. This is where we pick it up in

Chapter 2:26: The king asked Daniel (also call Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?” ²⁷Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

Again, Daniel: It is not about me. It is about God...it is about my God. It is about Yahweh. I don't have some secret magic trick or some superpower to tell you your dream, but I've got a super God and he has told me your dream and what it means. It is about the future, Nebuchadnezzar; your dream is about the future.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful to know that Daniel is reminding who the real God is; and he is subverting the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, and he is putting all these other magicians and astrologers to shame by putting God in the place where God is supposed to be. Little do you know, King Nebuchadnezzar, God is sovereign over your kingdom, too; and therefore, he can reveal the dream and he can reveal the interpretation of the dream. It is not about me; it is not about you; it is about God, who is in control of these things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Daniel 2 is a pretty long chapter. We don't have time on air here to read everything, but suffice it to say, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a giant statue; and the statue changed several times, but it was always made of strong stuff. It was a statue of gold, and then it was a statue of bronze, and then it was a statue of iron, and it just looks really powerful and impenetrable...this statue; but then Daniel goes on to point out one other thing: The problem is, all of those statues, the gold one, the bronze one, the iron one...when you get to the bottom of the statue, the feet of this man...this giant man...are made mostly of clay; and all you have to do is stomp on the feet, and guess what? No matter whether it is made of gold, bronze or iron, down it goes. Feet of clay. It must come from this passage, Darrell, the very phrase. All human empires will end that way. All man-made kingdoms...yours, Nebuchadnezzar, and those that will follow...the gold, the bronze, the iron...it doesn't matter. They will fail.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in picking up in verse 44 of the chapter, this is what Daniel says about the interpretation. He says: “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there you have it. God is God and you, Nebuchadnezzar and all your successors in history, you are not God. Of course, Nebuchadnezzar fancied himself, as many leaders in history have, Darrell...they thought they were lords and gods in their own right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Flash forward in history to the time of Jesus and the Caesars and the Roman Empire...*deus et dominus*...it was printed on every coin in the Roman Empire with a picture of the Caesar on it...*deus et dominus*: God and Lord. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was a god and lord, but Daniel, in interpreting the dream says: Nah; you are just a sinful man with feet of clay, Dude! You cannot last. There is only one God, and he is going to one day make a kingdom without end.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you would think at this point when Nebuchadnezzar hears there is another king who is going to come who is stronger and will last longer than the kingdom that he has...because every king wants their kingdom

to last forever...every king wants their glory and their fame and their splendor to be remembered forever...you would think that King Nebuchadnezzar would be upset and angry about what he heard, but his response is very shocking, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I mean, Nebuchadnezzar has been put in his place. I mean, Daniel has marginalized...and the God of Daniel has marginalized...Nebuchadnezzar here. By the way, when you were talking just now, Darrell, about everybody thinks their kingdom will live forever, it reminds me of Adolph Hitler in Germany, and the Third Reich, which is going to be a thousand-year kingdom...the Nazi regime is going to last a thousand years. Hitler was off on that by, well, just roughly a thousand years or so. He was just a little bit off. But anyway, Nebuchadnezzar has been put in his place; so, right; as you just said, Darrell, his reaction is surprising. Verse 46 of Chapter 2: Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." ⁴⁸ Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. So, once again, by honoring and being faithful to God, God in turn honors Daniel. So, the end of Chapter 1: Wow, Daniel and his three friends get elevated to the king's service. End of Chapter 2: Daniel gets a promotion yet again. It kind of reminds you of Joseph in Egypt; he is going to be put in charge of everything!

DARRELL DELANEY

The hand of the Lord is upon him, and because he honors God, God honors him. And so, we see a lot of rising and falling action in this book with King Nebuchadnezzar, who seems to be coming to his senses here; like, oh, we recognize and we give praise and honor to the God of Daniel; and it seems that he is going to go along with it, but we find out in Daniel Chapter 4 coming up next that he does not learn, and it does not stick, and we want to talk about that soon; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

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

We are going to jump ahead now to Chapter 4. The next program, the third program in this series, we are going to do Chapter 3, which is the fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but we are going to go to 4 because 4 is similar to 2 in that it once again deals with some dreams...or *a* dream anyway...that King Nebuchadnezzar has, and that Daniel is once again going to be in a position to interpret.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we remember that God has given Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and visions. That was mentioned in Chapter 1, and we just talked about it in the last segment, how God has given the revelation to King Nebuchadnezzar; and now, King Nebuchadnezzar has another problem on his hands. He is getting another vision, and which he narrates in this passage, and then Daniel will be in the situation where he is going to interpret it.

So, we will read that; and starting at verse 10, it says:

These are the visions I (King Nebuchadnezzar) saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹²Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. ^{13b} (paraphrased) Then a messenger from heaven said: ¹⁴"Cut down the tree and trim off its branches;

strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All right; so, when Daniel interprets this dream of this tree, Daniel says: King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the tree... You are the tree and God is going to cut you down and you are going to live like a wild beast; and God is going to drive Nebuchadnezzar into the wilds. He is going to be stripped of his wits. He is quite literally going to lose his mind; and nothing...Daniel will go on to say...nothing will change for you until you praise the one true God of Israel. So, odd, right? What do you mean, you are going to have your wits stripped from you; you are going to become an animal?

As we go on in Daniel 4, Darrell, that is exactly what happens. A whole year goes by, actually, and nothing happens; and then suddenly, a year later, we read this. Verse 33 of Daniel 4:

What had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. ³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. (I said) his dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" ³⁶At the time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne... ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, that last line! So, it is really a very crazy story because where does it fit in the eyes of the person who is trying to understand this, and where does it fit in the teaching of scripture? This isn't one of the Sunday school stories we heard when we were kids. What I would like to note is the fact that this actual passage reminds us that anyone who exalts themselves against God, and tries to rise up in pride will be humbled...will be subjugated...will be put in their place; and that includes King Nebuchadnezzar. He cannot be above the sovereign God who is the main character of this book. He will be humbled, and that is what happened.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a weird story. I mean, there are a lot of weird stories in the Bible; this one takes the cake. His nails grow and his hair... I mean, I saw a picture of this one time. He looked a little bit like, you know, one of the wild things from that book, *Where the Wild Things Are*. Kind of a crazy story. Walter Brueggemann writes about this in his book *Finally Comes the Poet*, and he summarizes the whole story of the book of Daniel with a chapter titled: Resistance and Relinquishment. Daniel resisted the king and stayed true to God; and in the end, the king had to relinquish his own power and acknowledge that the God of Israel alone has all the power—God holds all the marbles in the universe. Again, how did this happen that he lived like an ox and ate grass and grew fingernails as long as talons of a bird? I don't know, but let's not get worried about what happened or how it happened, Darrell. Let's conclude this program with what it means. Why did it happen?

DARRELL DELANEY

Why it happened: I think the first thing we need to understand is the life of Daniel and what he represents. I think people often, when they minimize this book, they moralize Daniel and say: You need to be like Daniel; you need to do what Daniel is doing; and I don't think that is the goal. I think Daniel is a symbol of what it means to be faithful to God, but God is the main character who gives Daniel the fortitude he needs, who gives him the strength he needs, the wisdom to excel, and God is the one who is empowering Daniel, but

Daniel is responding in what he considers to be faithfulness to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the second thing, Darrell, to understand this, we have to read this story from the perspective of those people in exile—from the perspective of the downtrodden—the people on the bottom of the heap—on the underside of history; people who have every reason to think that the powers and principalities of this world...this world's kings and presidents and police forces are stronger than God...we have to read this story from the perspective of those who have suffered so much injustice, they question...they *could* question anyway: Is there really a God of justice in heaven in the first place? And this story says yes there is. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the lord of all he surveyed. God says: No; I just point my finger at you and BOOM...POOF...you are an animal. That is what I can do, right? I can buy and sell you. From the previous dream in Chapter 2, you've got fragile feet of clay, Nebuchadnezzar. There is a God of heaven, and he is in charge; and Darrell, Daniel is a message of hope for hurting people. Daniel is an encouragement to the oppressed that their oppressors will not in the long run endure. Daniel is a testament to the victims of injustice, that the God of all justice is in charge; he is ruling; and he will establish a kingdom of shalom and justice that will be forever and ever. Weird dream...weird story, but a message we all need.

DARRELL DELANEY

Psalm 37 tells us not to fret ourselves because of evildoers, because the God of justice will address it; and we trust him in uncertain times. He gives us the faith to continue to walk it out, and the book of Daniel reminds us of his sovereignty, 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 turn to Daniel Chapter 3 to discuss the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego in the blazing, fiery furnace.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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