

God's Presence with His People

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes in advertisements, we see a video that gets played in reverse. Perhaps it is a commercial for a carpet cleaning product. First, we see someone accidentally drop a glass of red wine onto a white carpet. The glass shatters and wine goes everywhere; but then they play it backwards, showing the wine going back into the glass and the shattered glass pieces reforming into a whole glass and then zooming back into the person's hand. Sometimes watching something in reverse undoes a bad thing; but sometimes a reversal undoes something good. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see a major biblical event getting played backwards in Ezekiel, and the message this reversal sends is devastating. 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 third of five episodes on the biblical, prophetic, and sometimes vaguely apocalyptic book of Ezekiel. So, we have already seen the dramatic opening chapters of Ezekiel, when he has this vision of what we concluded was the majestic throne chariot of Yahweh—the God of Israel; and we also noted in the second episode that because of Israel's long self-deception that they had God in their back pocket no matter how badly they behaved, Ezekiel had the unhappy commission...the unhappy job...to go tell Israel the truth.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the children of Israel actually thought they could use God as some sort of rabbit's foot, where they just keep him around superstitiously: We're the children of God, nothing can happen to us; but they were in for a rude awakening because they found that God did not let their sin go. He really needed to address it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And today, we are going to see a devastating consequence of that sin that Ezekiel had to reveal to the people, and that is going to take us to Ezekiel Chapters 10 and 11; but before we get to 10 and 11, we need to do a little back story here, Darrell; and we really need to go all the way back to the original purpose of the nation of Israel as we find out about it back in Genesis 12.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in Genesis 12 it says: ¹The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."

So, God initiated these promises to them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; this is where it starts. Israel had to be a distinctive nation in a special relationship with God that the other nations didn't have so that eventually they would become a blessing to all those nations. So, we know

that it starts slow, right? Because God actually starts his mighty nation with a childless pair of senior citizens...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Abram and Sarai had not been able to have children, even when they were younger. So, it starts slow, but they do finally have a son, a miracle child named Isaac, but by the time you get to the end of the book of Genesis, it is still just a small family, who has now relocated to Egypt. So, they are going to be enslaved there, but eventually they get out of Egypt, and by the time they do, they pretty much are a nation.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the land and descendants that they were promised we didn't see at the end of Genesis; but then, by the time we get into Exodus, we see that he is finally setting up where they are going to have the land because they get out of Egypt, but the problem is that these things haven't fully manifested yet, and God is trying to give them instructions on how they should live when they go in, and this is where we get the descriptions in Exodus about the tabernacle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; ever since the Garden of Eden, when God had to leave Eden...when Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden...God wanted to restore fellowship with his people. So, he is going to start with Israel, and he starts with this thing called the tabernacle. So, if you ever read the book of Exodus, you know the first half of Exodus is lots of drama and action and parting the Red Sea; and then after that, we get a lot of laws, and then after that, we get chapter after chapter after chapter giving instructions on how to build this special tent in the wilderness called the tabernacle. Then we not only get the instructions, then we get chapter after chapter of their carrying out the instructions. Clearly, this tabernacle is important; and when we get to the very last chapter in Exodus, Chapter 40, we find out why it is so special, because we read:

³³Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. ³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. ³⁸So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

So, there it is. God's glory has moved back into the middle of Israel through the tabernacle.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the tabernacle is where God dwells, and the cloud represents his presence; and so God would actually lead them and teach them and be among them. That was the goal. He wanted to be among them; he wanted to be with them so that the people would know there is the presence of the Lord with us, and the tabernacle is that place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it gets succeeded by the temple. So once Israel finally finished its forty years of desert wandering, they moved into a city and then they had Jerusalem, and David wanted to build the temple. God said no, but Solomon did; so then we get to a similar passage to Exodus 40 in 1 Kings 8.

DARRELL DELANEY

It picks up and it says: ⁶The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. ¹⁰When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. ¹¹And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. ¹²Then Solomon said,

“The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; ¹³I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.”

Again, we see the cloud being the presence of the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The very glory of God is in the temple as it had been in the tabernacle. Solomon wants this to be forever; except that all along, Darrell, God had warned Israel that his ability to stay there could be threatened if the people didn't fulfill their end of the covenant bargain.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this is the infomercial part where the side effects come up; and you know, you watch the commercial, you heard the side effects of the drug that they are offering, right? But this is the part where God reminds them of the terms and conditions that say: If you obey me, you will be blessed and if you disobey me, you will be cursed. Foreign nations will come in. There will be plagues and these things if you do not honor your part of the covenant. That is literally what Deuteronomy 28 is about; and God is reminding them through Ezekiel: Hey, you broke the covenant, and there are repercussions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; God said all along: I am a holy God; you have to be as best you can be. Be holy as I am holy, right? That is sort of the theme of Leviticus, right? And in Deuteronomy, as you were just saying, Darrell. Be holy as I am holy, because a holy God cannot hang out among an unholy people. That is an intolerable situation. So, God said stay holy, fulfill my law, and then the glory of God can stay in the temple. But as you just said, Ezekiel's job was to tell Israel they had failed in that vocation. That was their calling and they had failed; and so, can God stay in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple? Can the glory cloud of God stay there? Well, Ezekiel is going to answer that for us 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 we have just seen the background, Darrell, of God's glory first dwelling in the Holy of Holies of that tent in the desert—the tabernacle; and then dwelling in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem in the Holy of Holies; but we have also just said that God had said all along he cannot hang around the people if they don't fulfill their covenant obligations—if they don't follow his law, take care of the poor, take care of the orphans, take care of the widows, have justice in your society; if you don't do that, I am out of here; and unfortunately, we are going to see now in Ezekiel 10 and 11 God did indeed have to leave.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up here in verse 15, it says: Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River. ¹⁶When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side. ¹⁷When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still; and when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them. ¹⁸Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. ¹⁹While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, suddenly, Darrell, the glory of God is on the move. It has been in the temple—it has been in the Holy of Holies, over the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant ever since Solomon's day, which is a long time ago, by the time we are in Ezekiel now, centuries before; and now suddenly God's glory has lifted, and it is now over an entrance to the temple; and then once we get to Ezekiel Chapter 11, we read, starting in verse 22:

Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. ²³The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. ²⁴The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. Then the vision I had seen went up from me, ²⁵and I told the exiles everything the Lord had shown me. And so, there it is, Darrell. That is the video of Exodus 40 with the glory of God entering the tabernacle...this is the video of 1 Kings 8, with the glory of God entering Solomon's temple getting played backwards. Now, it is gone...it is quite literally headed to the hills.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is to Israel's surprise to hear these words because they didn't think this would ever happen. So, it is probably their worst nightmare thinking about how we are going to be exiled out into a foreign country, and then God actually not going to be with us in that place when we go out there to be exiled; and they are far from God. They are not doing what God wants them to do; and because of God's holy character, it seems that he was evicted by them, because of his holy character not being able to dwell in a sinful place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is a consequence of Israel's behavior for centuries. I mean God was tolerant. This could have happened a long time ago...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The kingdom under David and Solomon was in pretty good shape. After that, when the kingdom was split in two, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, they had more rotten kings who did not follow God's law and did not encourage the people of Israel to follow God's law. They had far more rotten kings than good ones—far more bad temple priests and leaders than good ones. So, this could have happened a long time ago, but it is sort of like something has happened that was the straw that broke the camel's back, and God has left now. Ezekiel sees it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is unfortunate because God knew in his foreknowledge that he was entering into a suffering relationship with his people. When God entered into covenant with us, he knew that we were not going to be able to perfectly keep these laws, but I think that he would hope that we would want to repent and turn back to him when we actually had these sins that we needed to confess; but Israel went back to go worse and worse...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And they did not get better at it. They didn't know that they needed to have God come in and intervene in the situation, but because God is holy, he had to depart from that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and as we have been saying in this whole series so far, Darrell, they had actually deceived themselves so successfully that they thought they were immune from God's judgment; they thought nothing could threaten God's presence with them. As you said, it was like their rabbit's food or lucky charm. So, they had fallen so far from God that they didn't even realize this could happen; and actually, if we go forward in the book, all the way to Ezekiel Chapter 36, God reminds them of something they forgot.

So, here is Ezekiel 36:17. God says to Ezekiel:

^{17a} "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. ¹⁸So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they

had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹I dispersed them among the nations and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. ²⁰And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and yet they had to leave his land.' ²¹I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.

Israel didn't just have a bad reputation for themselves, Darrell, they were dragging God's name through the mud.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is from a God who says a good name is better than riches; and God's reputation and God's name and God's holy character is on the line, which is what Moses brought up when God wanted to wipe them out in Exodus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Moses says to God: Hey, what about your reputation? What about your name? What are they going to say, you brought us out here to destroy us? So, he reminds God of his covenant, and God is actually reminding them in this passage of his covenant. It is about his name: You are in covenant relationship with me. It is just like I tell our kids: Hey, you are Delaney's; go out there; this is Team Delaney; represent God; represent our family; don't bring any shame upon our name; don't do anything that we would regret, that is going to come back on us and say: What kind of family is that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because that is what God is saying about Israel. You are doing all these things; what kind of family is that?!

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, even in the Church today, Darrell, I think we sometimes forget this. Now, we have the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God and we are in Christ...we know that; and yet, we do represent Jesus. We are supposed to represent Jesus today, just as Israel was supposed to represent Yahweh, the God of Israel, then; but we forget, too. Israel forgot, and we sometimes forget. In fact, sometimes, Darrell, when the Church really messes up, sometimes we worry more about the Church's reputation than Jesus'; and what this passage reminds us of is that we should be more concerned with what people think of Jesus than what they think about our Church, because when the Church messes up, we bring Jesus down...

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Israel forgot that that was true with God when they messed up. It is something that we need to keep in mind, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Something we need to remember is that we are ambassadors for Christ...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is Christ's. He has to make his implore through us, and when we sin, we actually make God's character look bad. Eventually, is there going to be hope in this situation with Israel with Ezekiel giving them these words? Well, stay tuned and you will see.

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

And we have just seen, Darrell, a stunning reversal in Ezekiel 10 and 11 of the glory of God departing the temple, and departing, even, the whole city of Jerusalem and going out east over the mountains. It is because of Israel's sin, we have been saying, that this has happened. You asked at the end of the last segment: Is there any hope? Amazingly, Darrell, there is hope, even right in the midst of these two chapters of Ezekiel 10 and 11.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is powerful is that God is never predictable. He does things that often surprise us. He surprises Israel with this word that he is going to give right here in Chapter 11. He also surprises us when he sends his Son into this world to intervene into the situation of our sin; and I love a God who is going to surprise us with good things that are actually going to bring hope and encouragement; and in this passage, we can see that he is bringing more hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's hear from Ezekiel 11:17: "Therefore say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.' ¹⁸They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. ¹⁹I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing to see that God is going to do a divine heart surgery here, because there is nothing that is going to help Israel change their minds or their ways if God doesn't intervene; and he knows that they need this, and he is the only one who can do this kind of heart transplant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we are going to see in a future episode in this series...probably, I think, in the last episode...there will be a day when there will be a new temple, and there will be a day when the glory of God will return to that new temple. So, that is the promise, right? In Ezekiel 11, the very passage that shows us God's glory lifting up...the question becomes when is that prophesy fulfilled? So, the people of Israel after the exile kept looking to see, you know, maybe this time...maybe this time...when is the glory of God going to return to Israel?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and even in the prophecies around Jesus when he comes, they say is he the prophet? Is this the one? Is this the Messiah who is going to restore Israel? They even asked Jesus directly. I think Peter asked Jesus directly: Are you the one? Are you going to restore Israel? For us to know the days and the times is not important. God is literally going to do something about the situation and not just leave it to be bleak and

discouraging.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the meanwhile, eventually the people did return from exile. Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the temple—rebuilt the city. Later, King Herod will build what we call Herod’s Temple, which was the temple in Jerusalem in Jesus’ lifetime; and a lot of people thought maybe Herod’s Temple...maybe this is the temple...maybe this is where the glory returns; but no, no, no; but that is because people were looking for the glory of God in the temple in the wrong place. It turns out, the glory was right in front of them with...as you just said...with Jesus...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we get that in John 1, the very famous line from John 1:14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

As we pointed out before, Darrell, when John 1:14 says that Jesus, the Word made flesh, made his dwelling among us, that means he tabernacled...he pitched his tent...among us. Jesus is the new tabernacle—the new temple; and the glory of God that Ezekiel promised would return has returned in Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And there is the surprise, because God does it in a way that they least expect it. They are looking for bricks, they are looking for mortar, they are looking for buildings; and Jesus is walking by each and every day; and it is interesting that they did not notice that...and I don’t think we would notice it if John didn’t write it in his book. The point is to say: Look, there is the Lamb of God...there is the Messiah...there is the One who is going to be with us; and so, he literally became the Emmanuel by living among us and encouraging us; and this is the powerful promise that God restored us to his presence by being among us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The glory of God that Ezekiel saw leave the temple—leave the city—and hightail it over to the mountains returned in Jesus, the living temple; and now, Darrell, even more mind-blowing, the New Testament tells us that if *we* are baptized...if *we* dwell in Christ...now *we* each are living, walking, breathing temples of the Holy Spirit. So, the glory of God lives inside of each one of us now.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is beautiful is that he often dwells among us, but if you look at the history, you will see that it is never close enough. So, he walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve; it is not close enough. He built the tabernacle/temple, gave them instructions for the glory to be in their midst; not close enough. He put it in the temple so that every time they go in to worship; not close enough. Now, he puts it in Jesus and Jesus is walking around; not close enough. But then he puts it inside of us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, then we become the temple, because God is trying to get as close as he can to us because he loves us and he wants to address the sinful problems that we currently carry; and he does that in relationship by his Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Israel forgot that when they misbehaved, they brought God’s name down low; and we said that in the Church when we misbehave or when the Church misbehaves today, we bring Jesus’ name down low. It is a gift of

profound grace that we are now the containers of God's glory through the Holy Spirit, who gives us our connection to Jesus; but that doesn't mean we can live however we want; quite the contrary, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

That's right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If we take Jesus with us everywhere we go, then that is going to reflect how we behave, what we say, what we *don't* say, what we do, what we *don't* do. The glory has to shine through us.

DARRELL DELANEY

We are the ones who carry his presence; like I said earlier, we are ambassadors for Christ. So, it is as if Christ's hands and feet—his presence—are there when we go into these places, and we need to do the best we can to bring glory and honor to his name; and thanks to the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do that; and we bear the fruit of the Spirit every single day when we do what he calls us to do; and we are glad that we have the opportunity to do that, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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 study Ezekiel's recurring theme of God's judgments against Israel.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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