

Understanding God's Judgment

DARRELL DELANEY

I remember one time I got into trouble for breaking something that belonged to my mother. She and I were the only ones in the house at the time. She asked me if I had broken it, and I said no. Later on, I came in to ask her for a favor and she stopped me in my tracks. She expressed how upset she was with me and how she had been that way because I lied to her. Mom always had a way of seeing right through me. It didn't help that I had asked her for a favor without addressing what I had done. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will see a holy God who sees right through the hearts of the Israelites and addresses their behavior. We will also see that even though God is in the heat of judgment, there is hope and grace involved as well. 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 part four of our five-part series on the book of Ezekiel, and it seems that God has been very upset with the practices of his people, Israel; and because God is holy and he must judge sin, this episode is about that very topic because God is not just going to sit by and let things happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we have seen that Ezekiel has had a majestic vision of the throne chariot of God. We saw that in Ezekiel 1 and 2. We saw some of what we could almost call some of the skits...the acted out messages...some of the kind of strange that God asked Ezekiel to do: building a model of the city and laying next to it, or giving himself a haircut on the sidewalk, or...God asks Ezekiel to act out a lot of things; but the bottom line for Ezekiel was that the people's sins have consequences, and in the previous episode...in episode 3...we saw that the consequence of Israel's centuries worth of sin caused the glory of God actually to leave the temple in Jerusalem. The glory of God that symbolized the presence of God left because Israel had been so evil; and what we want to do in this episode is drill down into that a little bit more. What exactly had Israel been doing that was so bad that God's glory departed?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I think one of the things they did that was really bad, it is in God's Ten Commandments that you should worship no other god but him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And they broke that one repeatedly; and they also made graven images called idols that they would serve and worship, and God did not tolerate such things. He told them that, and they made covenant promises that they wouldn't do that; and for centuries, like you said, they continued to break those things, and God has had it up to here, because he is holy and he is fed up, and you said in the last episode that we cannot just do whatever we want because we are under grace, because we cannot determine that that grace is unlimited. It is not, and God is holy. So, we see that it needs to be addressed, and God is addressing it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, throughout the history of Israel, and in a lot of the other prophets...Hosea is the premier example here...God's covenant relationship with Israel was often compared to a marriage, and Darrell, nothing wrecks a marriage quicker than infidelity, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When one spouse goes after another person and forms a sexual and romantic relationship with that person, the marriage is usually ruined; but that is what Israel did. If God was supposed to be like their spouse, they went after other people.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They wanted to see other people; and that was the idols. You know, one of the things, Darrell, that God makes very clear in the first part of the Bible and in the book of Joshua is that when they went into the land of Canaan, they were supposed to clear it out of all the idolatry...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Take down the high places, because the high places were in the hills and the mountains where the temples to Baal and Asherah were; and God said: Clean that out; and Israel never quite did it. They never cleaned it out, and ended up going back to those Canaanite idols.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it became a vice for them for centuries because they didn't fully follow the instructions of the Lord to get rid of those things so their worship could be focused on him; and we see the repercussions of this, and this is where Ezekiel begins to rebuke them.

Starting in Chapter 14 it says:

Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me. ²Then the word of the Lord came to me. ³"Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? ⁴Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any of the Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet, I the Lord will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry. ⁵ I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'"

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. These are leaders, Darrell, of Israel. Elders of the people, and they come in front of Ezekiel for...I don't know...they wanted to talk, they wanted to hear something...but God whispers in Ezekiel's ear and says: Yes, these are the elders...these are the leaders...and guess what? Their hearts are full of idols. They aren't even worshipping me, they are worshipping other false gods; and who knows what all those idols were, but again, if God was supposed to be their partner—their covenant partner—their spouse, these men are guilty of spiritual adultery because they are coming in front of Ezekiel and God says: You cannot see it, but I see right through them, and in their hearts are idols.

DARRELL DELANEY

And unfortunately, they cannot tell that they carry these idols. They think that everything is fine because they are the people of the Lord, and God literally wants them to repent of the idolatry that they carry in their hearts; and God is upset about this because he is a faithful husband and they are cheating on him, if you will...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God wants them to come back and get back to whom they are supposed to be, back to the purpose and mission of being a light and a witness; and I thought about this; as a pastor, the scripture tells us that we need to be...not all of us should presume to be teachers because we are going to go under stricter judgement, but when you think about it, all of us have made idols in our hearts that we need to confess to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, because God judges leaders more harshly...these were the leaders...these were the elders of the people. You know, there is the old saying: the fish stinks from the head down, and when the head is bad...when the leaders of Israel...the elders of Israel are themselves worshipping idols in their hearts, that is just going to bring down the whole nation; and again, they had gotten to the point, Darrell, that they couldn't see it. They were quite successful in their self-deception. You know, they had kind of turned God into a spiritual ATM. He will give you what you want whenever you want it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was their lucky charm, their rabbit's foot; and he didn't even pay any attention when they disobeyed. He said he would stay with them, so he is going to stay with them, so we can live however we want, and God says: No; I see that your loyalties are divided, and it cannot stand.

DARRELL DELANEY

And unfortunately, as elders of Israel, they should have known better, they should have modeled better, they should have taught better. So, that is why they are the first ones to hear the judgment. But God is not going to ignore what they have done just to go ahead and give them whatever they are inquiring about; and I think that is the thing that we need to remember in our relationship with God, too. That is why he gives us the opportunity to confess our sins when we pray so that we won't have any blockage in our relationship...any disconnect...anything that would keep us from having a healthy relationship and fellowship with God; and we need to be sure that we can have that opportunity to confess these things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think it is important... You know, we have noted before, John Calvin's well-known line: The human heart is a perpetual idol factory. We are really good at it; and yes, okay; so today we don't have graven images. Typically, we don't worship Baal, and we aren't involved in some sexual cult like Israel was, perhaps; but you know, in the Heidelberg Catechism, a document from the Reformed tradition, when it talks about idolatry, it says idolatry isn't just worshipping something *instead* of God; it is also worshipping something *alongside* of God...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that might be more our temptation. Are we really trusting God for everything, or are we mostly trusting ourselves? Are we really trusting God for everything, or do we think that our stock market portfolio and our 401k plan is what really takes care of us? Are we really worshipping God alone, or do we really like our success and our reputation and so forth? So, the things we worship alongside of God, and as with these elders in Israel, God sees right through us and wants us to confess that so we rely on him alone.

DARRELL DELANEY

And when we don't confess it, God brings this judgment to rebuke us and reprove us; and that is actually where we are in the midst of this word that Ezekiel is giving to Israel. So, let us continue with that after this.
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; and Scott, we are in this word that Ezekiel is giving to the people of Israel. He started by talking to the elders and noticing that there is something going on in their hearts. Now, we are turning our attention from the elders to the people in this next passage.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ezekiel continues here: ^{14:12}The word of the Lord came to me: ¹³“Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its people and their animals, ¹⁴even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁵Or if I send wild beasts through the country... (and God goes on and on in this passage) ... ¹⁷Or if I bring a sword against that country... So, what God is saying is that if it were any other nation we are talking about here, nobody would question me for judging them for their evil; but even if they were in the country, they couldn't save the country, right? So, God is basically saying to Israel: Look, if I did this to any other nation, you would say, well yes, they deserve it. Well, guess what, Israel; so do you.

DARRELL DELANEY

God is giving a powerful word and there is literally nothing that is going to stop this judgment. So basically, the judgment has reached a point of no return, and it is going to happen. It is inevitable, and there is nothing you can do to get out of it. There is nothing you can do to change my mind; and God uses four things to do this judgment. One is, sword; the other is famine; another is wild beasts; and then plagues. Those are actually echoes from Deuteronomy 28; again, we keep going back to this, that God has already told them if you disobey me, these things will happen to you; and unfortunately, it is happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, this could have happened a long time ago...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God really was tolerant with Israel across centuries of rotten kings and corrupt leaders and false prophets and people who would rough up the real prophets who actually brought God's word. So, this could have happened at any time, but at some point, they passed what you might call the point of no return.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, this ship has sailed and judgment has to follow, or else, God isn't a just God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right; another thing that is important to point out, Scott, is that sin always affects a community of people. Case in point, like when we think about Jonah, how he ran away from God and disobeyed exactly what God called him to do when he was supposed to preach to the Ninevites. He goes down to Joppa and he gets on a ship and is heading for Tarshish; and then there is this storm that affects these people in the ship that have nothing to do with this because he is disobeying God; and Israel was supposed to be a light, they were supposed to be a witness, and they are affecting the whole community around them; and I wonder if sometimes the sins that I do that I think are just between me and myself and God, they might be affecting those around me; so I need God's forgiveness so that those repercussions don't affect the people who had nothing to do with this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God always has a communal relationship. God sees the whole and not merely the individuals, and that is why, indeed, he has had a relationship with all of Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were his covenant people, not just individual covenant people, but the people as a whole, and the consequences come to them as well; but even in the midst of this judgment, there comes this note of grace, right? Even in the midst of this chapter 14, where God is being pretty harsh and so forth, but then very soon we hear this:

²²Yet there will be some survivors—sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you, and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought on Jerusalem—every disaster I have brought on it. ²³You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

So, it reminds me, Darrell, of the flood story. So, Noah was mentioned in that chapter...Noah, Daniel, and Job...but the flood story was when God wiped out the earth because sin had become so pervasive, and yet, at the end of that, God says never again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, God actually kind of grieved the extent of the punishment from the flood; and so, he put the rainbow in the sky...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hung up his bow in the sky and said: I am not going to do this again. I have sometimes said that the story of the flood moves from grief to grace because God is said to be grieved...never angered...but God is grieved that he had even made people. So, he sends a flood, but when the flood is done, he says: I am not going to do

that again. I will find another way. So, we move from grief to grace; and I think this passage of return...people are going to return who are going to be different and better people...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is God's grace, saying: I am not going to wipe them all out forever. I am going to find a way forward and I am going to do it myself.

Darrell Delaney;

I am so glad we serve a God who doesn't hit the control-alt-delete buttons, or just zap everybody and try to start all over, but I love the fact that our God is like a restorer; our God is a redeemer; our God is into bringing things back and starting anew: Hey, let's start again! We want to have a new relationship; we want to have a redeemed relationship; and who would be the light if he destroyed everyone anyway?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I know he could create other ones, but I think it is really important that his covenant means so much to him that he literally still wants to be the God of Israel, and he wants to be our God; and I thank God that because Jesus died on the cross, he gives me an opportunity to confess and repent, and then I get a clean slate, and then I get another chance. I love that he gives that mercy, thanks to the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and what we see here, Darrell, is this progression that...okay, so God set up the covenant way back when with Abraham in Genesis. The covenant was sort of two different kinds of covenant. One was just a covenant of grace: I am just going to make you a people and give you a land.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then there was also the covenant that said: But you have to do your part, too. So, walk before me and be blameless, God says to Abraham, and God says to others; but over time, it becomes clear that, you know, if it is just up to us to fulfill that end of the covenant, it is never going to happen. Never going to happen. So, we keep moving closer in the Old Testament, and we see it again here where God says: You know what? I think I am going to have to fulfill the human end of this covenant, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do I do that? Jesus; the Son of God becomes human and he does what the rest of us humans couldn't do, hold up our end of the bargain.

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, when Jesus dies on the cross, he is taking our place for sin, yes; but he is also being what you just said, Darrell: our righteousness, so that our bad slate gets wiped clean, but we don't just go back to zero, we get given Jesus' righteousness, and that is the God who we see coming through here in Ezekiel. So, God is

right to judge, but grace is always close behind; and we will see more of that as we finish up this program. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we have been talking about God's judgment of Israel in Chapter 14, and how he is literally fed up with this because of his holiness. This is the straw that broke the camel's back; and he wants to address this sinful problem, but we also see a restoration of hope; and it is interesting that a judge of God's character would take this turn because he is holy and he needs to deal with the sin problem, but he also loves them and wants to restore them. It is a dilemma on our end, but God solves it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, we said earlier that in Ezekiel Chapter 36...earlier in this series, that is to say...we said that God had made clear that he has to take care of his own name.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He has to take care of his own reputation; and eventually he will say: And so, I am going to restore you, but not for you; I am doing it for me, because I really want this covenant thing that I started way back when with Abraham to work, even if I have to make it work myself. But the fact of the matter is, God cannot be a just God if he never judged. If he just winked it away...waved it away, pretended like the sin of Israel and the idolatry, the idols in their hearts...if God had just said: Nah, no big deal. That wouldn't be encouraging; that wouldn't be a just judge. God knows that the cosmic books have to balance.

DARRELL DELANEY

And his holy character cannot be compromised...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is what is being portrayed through a majority of this book of Ezekiel; and even when he picks it up here in Chapter 22, it says: ¹The word of the Lord came to me: ²"Son of man, will you judge her? Will you judge this city of bloodshed? Then confront her with all her detestable practices ³and say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You city that brings on herself doom by shedding blood in her midst and defiles herself by making idols, ⁴you have become guilty because of the blood you have shed and have become defiled by the idols you have made. You have brought your days to a close, and the end of your years have come. Therefore I will make you an object of scorn to the nations and a laughingstock to all the countries. ⁵Those who are near and those who are far away will mock you, you infamous city, full of turmoil.'" God is making it clear that they have literally brought this punishment upon themselves because they failed to keep their end of the covenant. There were repercussions that came with it, and now they are being reminded: Hey, this is what happens because you fell away from me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have gone to this many times, but the book of Deuteronomy is the Moses's swan song sermon, right before Israel went into the Promised Land as God's special, chosen, covenant people; and the theme of Deuteronomy is very simple: Remember, and do not forget; remember who you are; remember *whose* you are; remember who gave you the land; and God says it over and over in many ways. One of the things he says is: You know, you have been out in the desert for forty years. I don't give you manna...miracle bread...you die. You have been in the desert; it's dry. I don't give you miracle water from a rock, you die.

But you know what? You are going to go into this really good land; you are going to grow your own crops; you are going to have a well; you are going to get to the point and say: You know, I think I saved myself; I think *I* did all of this good stuff. I don't need God. Don't do that, Moses says; don't do that; and yet, that is exactly what the people did. Remember, do not forget...they forgot.

DARRELL DELANEY

They are not the only ones who forget, Scott. When we achieve things for ourselves, when we make a lot of money, when we get degrees in school, when we get promoted, when we have a lot of family members...a lot of children...whatever it is, sometimes our value is attached to what we achieve for ourselves. We have often been guilty of forgetting the Lord, and that he is the one who provided these blessings. He is the one who said that he would help us, he would watch over us, and he would give us what we need; and unfortunately, sometimes we forget him, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is too easy in the Christian life to move from amazing grace to, oh, I think God grades on a curve. You know, I think God likes me because I am good. You know, I contributed to my own salvation; I mean, how could God resist someone as morally good as me? So, we do; we kind of get independent. We think that we are self-made individuals. Our society celebrates that, right? We love the self-made man...the self-made woman, the rugged individualist. All of it tempts us to forget about the amazingness of grace and that we owe everything we have and everything we are to God in Christ through grace alone; and you know, we get ourselves into major spiritual trouble if we forget.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we also need to be reminded that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us; and while we were in our object of sin and whatever it was we were caught up in, God, who is rich in mercy, saved us by grace through faith. It is always going to be his grace that gives us an opportunity to come back again and to remember who the glory goes to, whose name it is for; and Israel forgot in this passage that they needed to keep God first; and if they kept God first, he would be the one who would go before them, he would be the one who provides and protects them; but because they tried to do their own thing, they got away from that, and that was the problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They had gotten far from God and they didn't even know it. We don't want to get so caught up in ourselves or in our own projects that we forget to pray, that we forget to thank God for everything, that we forget that actually every single day, since we still struggle with sin, we still need the grace of God in Jesus Christ every single day...not just once in a while when we really mess up. No, we have to remember what Israel forgot, and that is it is all a gift. So, Ezekiel is relentless, and we have seen some relentless passages of judgment, interspersed, though with hope and restoration, and we will see a lot more of that in the final program of this series; but there is always the grace behind the judgment, and for that, of course, we are very grateful. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we conclude our study of Ezekiel by examining the passages that show us God offering restoration and hope to his people.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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