
When Our Faith Defines Our Character

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever heard someone say, “God is in control”? This is a phrase I heard a lot when growing up and going to church. Being young, I didn’t pay close attention to how the person lived when they said this; and now that I am older, I realize a person will live a certain way if they believe these statements. When someone believes that God is in control, even if times are hard, they would do their best to live faithfully no matter the circumstances. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will examine the book of Daniel to see how people live when they truly believe that God is in sovereign control over all things. 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 beginning a six-part series on the book of Daniel. Needless to say, Daniel is a very interesting book. It is broken into two parts; half of it is narrative and the other half is prophetic visions, and I am excited to get into it with you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Daniel is a curious book because many people know just maybe two main stories, which we will cover in this series; and they kind of don’t know much about the whole rest of the book. In fact, that second half of the book that you just mentioned, Darrell, where we get into prophetic visions that almost borders on the apocalyptic now and then...that is not very well known to people at all. They know some stories about Daniel in the lion’s den, or the fiery furnace, but a lot of the book of Daniel is not as well known; but we are going to try to, in six episodes, cover the whole book; both the narratives, which will be the first part of the series, and then some of the more prophetic parts that come later.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the prophetic parts that you mentioned, they kind of echo Revelation. So, you remember we did a series not too long ago on the book of Revelation, where this literature is being brought out, and that style is the style that the last part of the book of Daniel is similar to; and before we get into it, I think we should think about the time, where we are in the history of Israel, what is going on, because right now, we are around 600 BC, where the fall of the northern kingdom has already happened. They used to be united under David and Solomon, but after that, they broke into the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. 722 BC is when the northern kingdom was fallen by Assyria, and then Babylon in 586. So, right in the ministry of Daniel, you see this is when the exile is happening, and that is what is happening in real time in this book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are in the exile...we are in that roughly 70-year period between Nebuchadnezzar’s conquering of Jerusalem and of the kingdom of Judah, and then eventually the release of Israel back to the Promised Land...back to Israel under the Persian king, Cyrus, after Cyrus defeats Nebuchadnezzar years later; and so, we are right in the middle of the exile, and that is where the action takes place; but let’s remember, Darrell, why there was an exile. Israel was the chosen people of God. They were given the Promised Land, conquered under Joshua. So, how did they end up in exile?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, the reason they ended up in exile...you have to go all the way back to the exodus. Moses is the deliverer who God used to bring them out of Egypt, and then he came down off the mountain with the Ten Commandments and the Law, so that they would know how they should live in that land. The theme of the book of Deuteronomy is to remember...remember God's commands, remember God's acts...and in Deuteronomy 28, he gives conditions under which they should live in that Promised Land, and we will talk about that right now, where in Chapter 28 it has conditions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Moses tells the people: If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on the earth. ²All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: ³ paraphrased You will be blessed; the city will be blessed; the country will be blessed...

Everything is great, right? So, the Lord will give you great blessing if you obey him, but there is a second part to this, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I love that you read this because the word *if* sticks out. It is a conditional clause. God says: *If* you obey me, you will be blessed; but he also turns it over in the other part of the verses: ¹⁵If you do *not* obey... (it says in verse 15) if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you. ²⁵The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies... (we skipped down to 25). You will come at them from one direction, but flee in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (And this is the one that sticks out to me in verse 49): The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰a fierce nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. ⁵¹They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or olive oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. ⁵²They will lay siege to all your cities throughout the land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down.

So, the idea, Scott, is that if you obey God, you will be blessed; if you disobey God, you will be cursed; and they actually will bring you into exile, and that is how we got here with the book of Daniel. These are the repercussions of not following God's laws.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God had sent prophets for many, many years, going as far back, you know, as Elijah and Elisha, trying to call both the northern kingdom of Israel...the ten tribes of the northern kingdom...and the two tribes of the southern kingdom known as Judah. The prophets kept calling; the prophets kept confronting them: You are breaking the law; you are abusing the poor; you know, all the things God told you in Leviticus and the Ten Commandments, but also the laws...the laws to protect widows and orphans and aliens. You are breaking them. You know, think of prophets like Amos: You are selling the poor for profit; trampling the vulnerable underfoot: STOP; and they never stopped...and they never stopped; and finally, you know, you get prophets like Jeremiah eventually who will come and weep...the weeping prophet...because now it is done: You were warned. The curses of Deuteronomy that Moses warned you about? They are coming; and they did come...for the northern kingdom, it came through Assyria; but a century later, for the southern kingdom of Judah, it came from the Babylonians; and they carted all of the people who didn't get killed in the siege of Jerusalem...they carted them off to Babylon, where they would be for a good seventy years.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is unfortunate that God in his mercy gave centuries and centuries of warnings, that if they had listened, and they would have repented, then they wouldn't have been in the situation they were in; but because they failed to do that because their hearts were hard, the consequences of their actions kind of caught up with them, Scott; and that is how the book of Daniel begins, in that backdrop of these are the things that happened

as consequences of failing to obey a merciful God who gave chance after chance.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and we did a series on *Groundwork* some while ago on the book of Ezekiel; and if you remember, Darrell, in Ezekiel 10 and 11, Ezekiel has this vision where the Spirit of God...the presence of God...leaves the temple. That was always what made Israel unique. The Almighty God Yahweh dwelled in the Holy of Holies in the temple; sat upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant like it was God's earthly throne; and Ezekiel sees that Spirit of God...the glory of God...departs the temple and literally heads to the hills. Ezekiel says someday that glory will come back, and as we said in that series, ultimately that only happens with Jesus, who will become the true temple in which God dwells again; but in the meantime, Israel is facing the consequences of its sin; and among the people who got carted off into exile is somebody named Daniel, and several friends; and in just a moment, we are going to go right to Daniel Chapter 1 and pick up the action there. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

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 we just said, Darrell, we are going to go to Daniel 1, so here we go. Daniel 1: In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. (Now skip down a little bit): ³Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. ⁶Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I mean, before we get into this...there is so much good stuff here, Scott...I think we just need to give a backdrop and understand that even though God is not mentioned all the time in this book, God is the main character of this book. Nothing happens apart from God's will in this book, and God has allowed the Israelites—these people—the best and brightest, if you will, to be taken into exile for some reason, and his reason is that he will get the glory out of it; and so, the first thing that needs to be established, Scott, is that God is the main character...the reason why these things are happening; not because God caused them, but because he can work in spite of them because he is the God over all things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if there is one thing Babylon wants to do, it is to try to make them forget about that God, right? They want to supplant Israelite religion...Israelite customs...with Babylonian religion and Babylonian customs; and one of the first things they do is give them new names. They don't want them using their Hebrew names. They give them new names. Now, what is interesting, Darrell, is Daniel is the Hebrew name of Daniel; and it is used all through the book. We know Daniel. The other three characters...maybe because of Sunday school days and the story of the fiery furnace that we will get to in our third episode of this series...we know them by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But their real Hebrew names are Hananiah, Mashaël and Azariah; and the author of Daniel is very clever. He uses those Hebrew names as often as he can as a way of saying: You, Nebuchadnezzar...you, you Babylonian officials...you are not going to knock the Yahweh out of these people. You are not going to take the Hebrewness out of these Israelite boys. They are going to stay true to God, and we will be seeing that in this story and in subsequent stories.

DARRELL DELANEY

Your name and identity are extremely powerful in the life of someone. So, if you can remember your name, if you can remember the name of the people you come from, that can give you strength in a very foreign place...in a place that is unfamiliar; and the author is clear to say that they have been given the aptitude to learn and to grow and to be able to understand Babylonian culture and language. God has given them the ability to do that; and God has not delivered them out of a situation that might be uncomfortable for them, but he has given them exactly what they need to thrive in a situation that does not seem ideal.

You know, it really bothers me sometimes when I hear people say: I cannot work there because there are not enough Christians there; or they say: "This is not my cup of tea" because they don't feel like, okay, they don't believe what I believe or they don't go the way I go as far as what I hold dear to myself in my life and my beliefs...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But God has given us the ability to shine our light no matter what context we find ourselves in; and Daniel and his friends have shown that God can do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they apply themselves. I mean, they do well in the king's service; and it reminds you, Darrell, of that verse from Jeremiah, where Jeremiah says to the exiles in Babylon: Pray for the prosperity of that city...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because if the city does well...even though it is a Babylonian city...if the city does well, you will do well, and can survive until that day when I deliver you; and so, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah are good examples of working for the prosperity of the enemy, really, of Babylon; but that is what God told them to do. However, they weren't going to do it all in Nebuchadnezzar's way, and that is the next important part of the story, starting in verse 8.

DARRELL DELANEY

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." ¹¹Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

Basically, at the end of the ten days, Scott, they were found healthier and they looked more nourished than everybody else, so he said: Okay, you can continue with that. This was an issue of integrity for Daniel; it was an issue of purity for Daniel; it says that he didn't want to defile himself. Now, there are some cases where they worship other gods in Babylon, and so, this is some of the food and drink that they had sacrificed to the idols; and Daniel wanted no part of that because he wanted to devote himself to God; but also, Leviticus tells them the foods that they should and should not eat, and some of this could have been not kosher, and for their own health and for their own religion, they are not going to eat it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it might be more than that, too; because, you know, as Walter Brueggemann, the great Old Testament scholar said: The thing is, if you eat the king's food, sooner or later, you begin to think the king's thoughts after him.

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we have seen this, you know. You can just imagine that, let's say, in the United States you have some great job in the White House, and the president, you know, elevated you and you got to attend state dinners and you hang out with the celebrities who come to the White House, and you hang out with foreign heads of state and you eat all this great food from the White House kitchen; and eventually, you don't want to mess that up; and someday maybe you have an occasion where you need to tell the president you disagree, but you don't want to do it because I want to keep eating that food; I want to keep having my place at the table, right? But instead, as Brueggemann says, Daniel is going to risk his oddness, and he said: Me and my friends, we are children of a different bread. We are children of a different bread; we don't want to... You can call me Belteshazzar instead of Daniel, but I am serving Yahweh first of all, and not Nebuchadnezzar; and I don't want to get so cozy with Nebuchadnezzar that I forget who I am and *whose* I am...to whom I belong...and that is my God, Yahweh.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting that you said that they put their oddness on the line. Daniel could have very well put his literal life on the line...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because if you defy the king...if you disagree with the king...if you oppose the king...it is nothing that is keeping that king from taking your life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

Are you defying me? Oh, you are out of here! Oh, you think you can oppose me? Who do you think you are?! And so, Daniel actually put his life on the line, saying: I don't want to eat this food and drink this drink. I want to honor God with my body, and I want to honor God with my life; and so, he knew he could have been killed for that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But it is really crazy because he decided that he would put that on the line and sacrifice it because he wasn't going to sacrifice his integrity, and the devotion he had to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have all heard the phrase: When in Rome, right? When in Rome, do as the Romans do. But Daniel said: I am in Babylon, but I am not going to do as the Babylonians do because I want to keep my heart devoted to my God above all; and indeed, it did risk his life. But coming up next, let's break down the final section of that chapter and get some practical application. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and as we come to the close of the first chapter of Daniel, we just want to talk about some practicals that go along with it; but before that, we want to explain a little bit about the abilities that God has given Daniel that we see in the first chapter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Daniel and his friends said: We are going vegetarian. We are not going to eat all the king's rich food. We don't want to get sucked into the king's way of living and seeing; and they turn out to be healthier after a ten-day test period than all the guys who were eating all the rich, you know, fillet mignon and hollandaise sauce on their asparagus. So, these guys end up being very healthy; and God rewards them. Verse 17: To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. (That is going to be important for our next program). ¹⁸At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them (these four) to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked with them and found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see that God, the main character, again shows up. Not only does he give favor with the servant that is actually in charge of them, who gives them the food. He gives them the ability to understand dreams and visions. God is the one who is going to get the glory for all the things that are happening in their lives; and one thing that is important to note as well is that they do what they can do to the best of their ability, and they leave to God to do what he does to the best of his ability. So, they want to make sure that they honor God and be excellent and do things to one hundred percent of what they can do; but then, the things that are beyond their control they allow God to handle, like being thrown into exile in the first place. They had no say over that; but they do have say over how they do with the language and culture. He allows them to be exalted.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All glory to God is what they say. It reminds me of a couple of verses from the New Testament, from 1 Corinthians: ^{10:31}So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. That is what Daniel and his friends did. Or Colossians 3: ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

And that is the position, Darrell, of Daniel and his friends, who once again were referred to with their Hebrew names in what we just read: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They are true to God and God is true to them, and they give God the glory.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I believe that because they are humble and they always give God the glory, that is actually a good model for us as Christians. We shouldn't get caught up in: We earned this; we did it our way; the false meritocracy that this world tries to give us, like, oh yeah, I did that; and my name is on this, and I am important because of this. We don't get our identity or our value from the things that we produce, but we give glory to God

because he is the one who gave us the ability to do that. So, my kids get good grades and they come in with their chests poked out and they are so excited; they are like: Dad, look! Look at my grades! And I say: Who made you smart? And they say: Oh, yes; Jesus made us smart.

So, God gave us the ability to learn; he gave us the ability to pass a test. So, at a young age, we are trying to help them understand: Give God the glory for what they do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like when I came home with report cards with less than good grades, my dad assured me that that was on me; and maybe I should look to Jesus a little bit more; but indeed, they looked to Yahweh; and again, as you said earlier, Darrell, they all four could have been killed for disobeying the king's order to eat his food and his wine at his table. They could have been killed; and they took a risk. I mean, they trusted that they would turn out fine after their ten-day vegetarian diet, but they didn't know. They trusted God and God rewarded them and took care of them; and that maybe reminds us of a final practical thing that we can think about, Darrell, as we close out this episode. Context should not define our character, right? I mean, we are always tempted to let our context go with the flow, you know...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Go along to get along, you know; different strokes for different folks. These are classic American slogans, which say: Hey, you know, you conform; wherever you are at, you conform; and yet, this is a story of four men who wouldn't conform because they wanted to stay true to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

And even if we are the only ones standing, shining our light, it is still worth it because God gets the glory out of that. Many of the movements during the civil rights time and things where people were fighting against injustice, the majority was saying: No; this isn't the way we are supposed to do this; but then, they realized because of Christ and because of the Bible, that there is a way to justice; that there is a way to shalom; and there is a way to get there together; and so, even though it was not a popular opinion, they didn't do it for popularity; and as Christians, we have to understand that sometimes we are put in a very uncomfortable situation, and we may be the only one speaking out and crying out for righteousness, but God has given us the ability to not only do the best we can there, but honor God and remember who is in control and has the final say over it. It isn't the government; it isn't the king; it is Christ and Christ alone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When you think about it...when you think about their context, they had every reason to think God would let them down. What do we owe God? If God had been with us, why didn't he defend Jerusalem? How could Jerusalem have fallen? How could the temple have been destroyed, and its precious artifacts carried off here to Babylon to enrich King Nebuchadnezzar, this loathsome character? They had every reason to sort of think: We don't owe God nothing. He let us down, you know. But no; they don't understand maybe all the reasons and the whys and the wherefores, but they still believe God is with them in that context, in that place, in that uncomfortable situation; and they want to honor him and be faithful; and they did. Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee. We hope you will join us again next time as we study King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in Daniel Chapters 2 and 4.

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

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