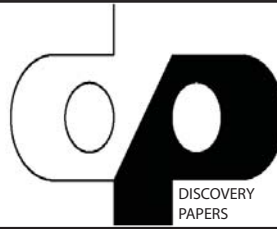


WHEN THE END ARRIVES

SERIES: WHEN KINGDOMS COLLIDE



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Daniel 10:1–12:13

Many movies describe the end of the world. Armageddon, Interstellar, Snow Piercer, World War Z. Even kids movies describe the end of the world, like Ice Age and WALL-E. We are fascinated with the idea that our world will end and we want to know how.

In 1920, a few years after the end of World War I, Robert Frost wrote a famous poem about the end of the world. It was called *Fire and Ice*.

*Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.*

This topic intrigues us. Will the world really end? How will it end? What should we do about it?

Today we are finishing up our series in the biblical book of Daniel. We've called this series *When Kingdoms Collide* because we've observed that this book is honest about the presence of two realities. On the one hand, there is the kingdom of man that defines most of our daily lives. But if you believe in Jesus, you also believe in the kingdom of God: the spiritual reality of God and his work in the world..

This first half of this book contains six stories about times when these kingdoms collide. The second half contains four visions about the final collision at the end of all time. These visions show us how history will conclude. They describe the final coming of the kingdom of God. They are about the end of the world.

We've been looking at these visions over the past few weeks during this season of Advent. We've talked about justice finally arriving, what happens when people put themselves in the place of God, and how to wait when it seems like God's promises are taking forever. Today, we're looking at the last vision and

thinking about the conclusion of all of this. This morning we are going to see what Daniel says about the end: what happens when the end arrives.

Right about now you're wishing you had picked a different church for Christmas weekend. Why would we be talking about the end of the world four days before Christmas?

I've suggested before that Advent is actually the time of the year when we pay particular attention to the fact that Jesus will return. These visions have helped us think about the condition of the world before his return. They have helped to show us what the coming kingdom of God looks like.

In four days we will celebrate the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, the coming of God to earth. But what we celebrate is more than a birth. We will celebrate the beginning of a process. The birth of the Messiah is the start of a sequence of events that will ultimately reach their conclusion with what happens in Daniel's vision.

I realized something similar when my wife and I had our first child. I was excited to have a baby. We had read the books and taken the classes and felt as prepared as we could to have a baby. But then I realized something. Having a baby now meant that in ten years I would be the parent of a ten year old. In thirteen years, I would have a teenager. In twenty-five years, I would be the parent of an adult. I wasn't sure I was ready for those things. But when my baby was born, a process would begin. That train would leave the station and there was no stopping it.

The birth of Jesus begins a sequence of events that concludes with his return. Why else would the angels sing about "peace on earth and good will toward men?" Look around. Do you see peace on this earth? Do you see good will everywhere you look? No. At least not yet. The angels weren't saying that Jesus being born would bring that. They were saying that his birth brought about a process that would culminate in those things being true.

As Christians, then, when we celebrate Christmas, we do so in the hope that his birth was just the first of

two arrivals. Our ultimate hope is in his return, when he will complete the work he began and bring in the peace and righteousness of the kingdom of God.

So what will that look like? How will the world end? With fire? Or with ice? How will we know that it is coming? Will it be peaceful or catastrophic? How do we even know for sure that Jesus will return?

These are the questions that this final vision in Daniel addresses. It is a huge section of Scripture. We're going to be covering all of chapters 10, 11, and 12. These three chapters tell one continuous story of how this vision is received, what the vision contains, and how Daniel responds to it.

We obviously don't have time to go into the minute details of all three chapters. So our approach this morning will be to take a few verses from each chapter that highlight the major themes of this vision. We'll pull out three different scenes to get a broad overview of what is going on.

The advantage of taking such a large block of Scripture is that we'll see how it all fits together. This passage is like a carefully woven scarf. Each piece connects to the next to hold it all together. Seen in its entirety, it speaks powerfully to us about the promise of the end and the hope that we have.

So let's look at what Daniel's final vision has to say about when the end arrives.

There is more

Chapter 10 describes how Daniel receives this vision. We are told that Daniel is grieving. He goes through a process of mourning for three whole weeks. During that time, he only eats the most basic kinds of food and he doesn't bathe at all.

The reason that Daniel does this is probably because he just heard some bad news from Jerusalem. A few years earlier, the king had allowed some of the Jews living in exile to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple. They had arrived and begun the process. But some people living near Jerusalem got together to stop them and the construction had come to a halt. The timing of the chapter in verse 1 puts it right around this time.

Doesn't this happen to us? Don't we get discouraged and overwhelmed when we look around at what is happening in the world?

So Daniel heard about terrible things happening in the world. Because of that he mourns and he prays.

He's probably asking that God would do something about it. He probably wants God to fix all the terrible things happening in the world. And God answers him.

God sends an angel to tell him something. This angel looks like a priest. He shines and his voice sounds like a bunch of people all talking at once. Ezekiel seems a very similar angel and in the book of Revelation, Jesus appears in a vision looking very similar to this, as well.

But what is really interesting is what the angel says about why it took him so long to get to Daniel. Remember that Daniel had been mourning for three weeks. This is what the angel says in Daniel 10:12-14:

Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. ¹³The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come."

This is a fascinating passage. Apparently, as soon as Daniel started mourning, this angel started to come to Daniel in order to give him this vision. Instead of arriving immediately, though, he was detained because of the "Prince of Persia" which seems to refer to some other kind of spiritual being. Then a third character, the angel Michael, came to help him out and he was able to get away to come to Daniel.

This vision is a glimpse into what is happening beyond our senses in the spiritual realm. We are looking into the supernatural kingdom of God. But it is just a peek: just enough to make us really curious. Some people have tried to figure out exactly how angels operate based on this and a few other passages. But that misses the point. We aren't shown enough to understand everything. But we can observe a few things.

What happens on earth might be reflected by a supernatural reality. There are supernatural beings that come into conflict with each other. They might even be assigned to nations or maybe even people. Finally, it looks like the prayers of those who worship God are viewed with great importance.

At the very least, we can conclude that there is more going on in the heavenly realm than we are

aware of. God didn't reveal the whole org chart of heaven to us. We don't know exactly how it all works, but we know that there is more than we can see. This vision begins with a glimpse into heaven that helps us remember that there is more.

The old Transformers toys used to have this motto: "More than meets the eye." That's certainly true here. This glimpse into heaven assures us that on a spiritual realm, there is more than meets the eye.

Don't we love to think about how there is more than meets the eye during this time of year? We talk about Santa Claus, who can travel to every house in the whole world on one evening without being seen. We watch movies about Christmas miracles. Even people without any faith in God seem to be drawn to the idea that there is something more. Something significant. Something almost magical about this season.

The Christmas story that we celebrate is full of interruptions from this supernatural reality. Things we can't explain. A virgin becomes pregnant. An angel appears to Joseph. A star lights the way to the stable. Shepherds are serenaded by an angelic chorus. Wise men from afar perceive the significance of this event in Bethlehem.

I think we desperately want there to be more than what we can see. If what we can see is all there is, then we live in a pretty depressing world. What you see can't be what you get. That would be too sad. There must be something else out there. Just like Daniel, we get discouraged by what we see around us. So God shows up to let us know that there is more out there than what we can see.

The beginning of this vision gives us a glimpse of that something more. This is what happens behind the curtain. This is the spiritual realm.

God knows

This angel who worked so hard to get to Daniel now gives him the vision itself. But it is not about heavenly beings. It is about what happens on earth. The vision starts by describing events in the international political arena between the 5th and 2nd century BC.

It begins with the kingdom of Persia. Then it describes the fall of Persia to a mighty king of Greece. This is presumably Alexander the Great. Let's look a portion of the vision describing events that happen

after that king falls. Here is Daniel 11:5-6.

"Then the king of the south shall be strong, but one of his princes shall be stronger than he and shall rule, and his authority shall be a great authority. After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she shall not retain the strength of her arm, and he and his arm shall not endure, but she shall be given up, and her attendants, he who fathered her, and he who supported her in those times."

This part of Daniel's prophecy is incredibly consistent with what we know of the actual history in the ancient Near East.

The first king of the south lines up with Ptolemy I, the king of Egypt beginning in 322 BC. One of his princes was Seleucus I who became king of Syria over a much larger province. In 250 BC, their descendants made a pact when Ptolemy II offered Antiochus II his daughter in marriage. That marriage was short lived when Antiochus returned to his first wife, who immediately murdered him, his new wife, and their son.

We don't need to walk through every single detail. The point is that the whole first part of chapter 11, up until around verse 21, describes in detail the constant political conflict happening in the part of the world surrounding Jerusalem. Marriages, alliances, battles, and betrayals are all easily correlated with other historical documents. This is, by far, the most detailed prophetic passage in all of Scripture. There is an incredible correspondence with what we know of history.

The point is to look at history in light of the supernatural kingdom that we just got a glimpse into. Here's all this stuff happening on earth, but remember that there is more than meets the eye. All the national and international happenings of this world occur within the realm of God's cosmic rule. History is not just history. It all unfolds with God's knowledge.

This prophecy helps us to realize that God knows nations.

We need to know this. It helps to know that there is a supernatural reality. But what good is it if it's just out there? We need to know that the God of heaven is also God over the things of this earth. We need to remember that God knows about ISIS. God knows what is happening in American politics. God knows about the demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri and

downtown Hong Kong. All of that happens under the rule of God.

God knows about the big events in the world.

Then the prophecy changes. It moves from describing the large scale international movements of power to talking about one particular king in the second century. We've heard about him before in the book of Daniel. His name was Antiochus Epiphanes and he was the king over the area surrounding Jerusalem during the second century BC, when this book was originally read. This was their king.

Let's read a portion of this part of the prophecy from Daniel 11:29–32.

“At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but it shall not be this time as it was before. ³⁰For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. ³¹Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. ³²He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

We heard before about what Antiochus did. He had tried to attack the area of Egypt, but he was turned back by a Roman ambassador. This is the reference to “ships of Kittim.” On his way back through Jerusalem, he began a campaign against the practice of Judaism. He stirred up leaders against the Jews. He prohibited sacrifices at the temple.

He went as far as to sacrifice a pig to the god Zeus in the Jewish temple. This is probably what is referred to as the “abomination that makes desolate.” This act was the ultimate insult to Jews and to their God. As the passage says, though, the people who know their God did stand firm and they took action against Antiochus. This was the Maccabean revolt that we discussed a few weeks ago.

So this part of the prophecy has moved from the past to the present, from international schemes and alliances to current events. The effect of that movement is that the readers are now convinced that God not only knows nations, but God knows them. God knows us.

God is not only sovereign over presidents and

kings and the large scale events of this world. He is also sovereign over the details. He knows about your boss or your landlord or your parents or your friends or your neighbor or whoever it is that is making life complicated right now.

You might not be a king, but the details of your life matter. God knows what you're going through. It doesn't matter whether you are the leader of a large company or a programmer writing code in a tiny cubicle or a recovering addict or a student in fifth grade. God knows and cares about what happens in your life.

Do you see what this prophecy is doing? It started with this cosmic vision of angels in the heavenly realms. Then it moved into the things of earth on a large scale. We saw how the spiritual realm intersected with grand political events. But then it moved to the current events of a particular people. Now you have seen how the spiritual realm can intersect with your life.

Moving from here, we are going to see into the future. All of this has been preparation to show us what is to come. That's what the angel said in 10:14, “*the vision is for days to come.*” The scene with the angels, the reign of kings, and the current events have all prepared us to hear what God says will happen in the future. This is what we need to hear. This is how the end arrives.

Expect trouble ... expect peace

We started off by thinking about Robert Frost's poem about the end of the world. Around the same time, another poet, T.S. Eliot, wrote a different poem about the end of the world, called *The Hollow Men*. It's full of disillusionment and sadness. In it, the state of the world gradually slides into nothingness. The last lines of the poem read like this:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Eliot envisioned a world that just dissolves away quietly. It's not a peaceful end. It's a defeated surrender to meaningless.

At some point in Daniel's vision, it changes from describing events that we can recognize to what happens in the future. People disagree about where that change happens. But most people agree that by verse 40, this vision is describing the end of the world.

The future that Daniel describes is not at all like what T.S. Eliot suggests. Here is Daniel 11:40–41.

“At the time of the end, the king of the south shall attack him, but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. ⁴¹He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites.

The vision continues speaking of the “king of the north” taking violent action against the rest of the world and against the people of God. Earlier in the vision, this seemed to refer to Antiochus Epiphanes. Now it seems to refer to some future leader. This is the biblical picture of the anti-Messiah or the antichrist. This is not referring to a single leader, but to a category of leader that will exist throughout history and culminate at the end of time.

The antichrist is every leader that rises up in complete defiance of the things of God. It is a category that describes those bent on destruction, oppression, and violence. It is Adolf Hitler. It is Josef Stalin. It is Chairman Mao. It is any world leader who kills and destroys without any hint of morality. This vision reveals that there will be this kind of leader during the end times.

The Christmas story itself has an antichrist. Shortly after Jesus was born, the king in the area, Herod the Great, heard that someone was born who might challenge his rule. So he launched a campaign to destroy him. All he knew was that this baby was born in Bethlehem, so he decreed that all boys under two years old in Bethlehem be killed. Scholars estimate that there would have been around 20 boys that age living in Bethlehem. Can you imagine?

The end of the world does not come quietly. Justice and righteousness and peace are not always embraced. People in power fight it. It's not like Jesus will return and everyone will all of a sudden realize who he is, give up their agendas in order to worship him, and gather in a circle to sing “Kum By Yah.” That is not how the end of the world will happen.

We've called this series *When Kingdoms Collide* because this is what kingdoms do. They collide and they come into conflict. When Jesus came the first time, he suffered at the hands of the kingdom of man. But the Bible seems to predict that when he returns

it will be different. We aren't told enough to know exactly how it will play out. But it will be messy. Chaos and war and conflict. Kingdoms don't pass quietly.

The end will arrive with conflict. We are told in advance so that we can be prepared for it. The end of the world will not be a Jimmy Stewart movie. It will be troubled. We can expect trouble.

We know that the kingdom of man will come into conflict with the kingdom of God. We can expect trouble. But sometimes Christians have responded to this information in what I think are unhelpful ways. Some people, in awareness of this conflict, have put themselves in combat mode already. They know that conflict is coming, so they want to get a head start on it.

Notice that I said that we ought to expect trouble, not create it. Christians sometimes seem like they want to fight the world. We think that the world is against us so we decide that we ought to be against them. We see culture moving away from what we perceive as a Christian history, so we think we need to rise up and fight it. We think we need to enter into the conflict.

But that's not what God invites us to do. The Bible doesn't say that God's people rise up and defeat the forces of a splintering culture. It says that the world moves further and further away from God. God's people mourn that process, but they cannot reverse it. Only the true king, when he comes to establish justice and righteousness, brings the world back to God.

This is why Paul says this in Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We are not called into battle against the people of this world. Our conflict is fought in the heavenly realm. We don't rise up and fight God's battles. We expect conflict, but we don't go looking for it.

As we wait for Jesus, our call is to bring peace and healing and justice to those who suffer. We offer compassion, not combat.

The reason is that we know God will fight his own battles. He will return. This is how the vision ends. Here is Daniel 12:1–3.

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

There shall be a time of trouble. There will be conflict and chaos. But it will be resolved. The eternal kingdom of God will arrive. There will be peace. Those who know Jesus will shine like the brightness of the sky. We can expect trouble, but we can also expect deliverance. Expect peace.

When we began this series during the season of Advent, I asked a very important question about hope. I pointed out that people think of Christmas as a season of hope. But I said that if our hope isn't based on anything, then it isn't good. If the hope of Christmas is like me hoping that I'll win the lottery, then we are in trouble. Is Christmas hope just optimism? Or do we have a reason to hope?

One of the main points of this vision is to give us a solid basis for our hope. The whole vision is an epic sampling of history. It began in heaven with angels running late. It continued through some very specific parts of known history. It landed in a current situation, but contained details that seem to point forward as well. The last part talks about the future.

We can be sure that God knows about our future, because he knows about heaven, he knows about the big things that happen in the world, and he knows about the stuff that happens in our lives. We can trust God to tell us how things will turn out.

And he says that in the end, those who trust him will be delivered. They will awake to everlasting life. They will shine like the brightness of the sky above, like the stars forever and ever. Other places in Scripture describe this coming kingdom as a return to the paradise of God's original creation, but improved. Paradise 2.0. Perfection, only better. God will remake the world with justice.

The point of this vision is to help us to know that peace is coming after all the trouble that we see. At the end

of the chapter, the angel tells Daniel to hang in there. Verse 13 reads,

But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in our allotted place at the end of the days.

We can face trouble because we know that peace is coming. We don't know when. We don't know exactly how, but we know it is real. We have a real hope. It isn't just optimism. We can expect peace to come to this world.

This is what the entire book of Daniel has been suggesting all along. All the stories in the first part of the book told us about times when God showed up in surprising ways amidst the kingdom of man. The visions in the last part of the book tell us about when God will show up and defeat once and for all the forces of evil and death. All of this is given to us so that we can have endurance. So that we can “go our way until the end.” The kingdom of God is real. The kingdom of God is coming to earth.

Conclusion

In four days, we will celebrate the beginning of that process. The book of Daniel describes the angel Gabriel coming to help Daniel understand the things of the end. In the book of Luke, the angel Gabriel shows up again. This time he has a message for a young woman named Mary.

He urges her not to fear. He tells her that she has found favor with God. And he tells her in Luke 1:31–33 that something is about to begin.

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

A king is to be born. A king who will be the Son of God. A king who will be given the throne of God. A king who will rule forever.

This is how the end arrives. It begins with a baby in a manger. But it ends with a king on a throne. We haven't gotten there yet. This world is far from experiencing the righteous rule of God. But that rule will come. It will come with conflict and chaos. But it will come.

The world will not end with fire. It will not end with ice. In fact, it will not really end. The world will be remade by the coming of Jesus Christ and he will bring peace.

Jesus, we celebrate your birth. But we wait for your coronation. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Come.