



How's it going to end? * Daniel 10-12, Matthew 24
June 27, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Years ago, one of my favourite movies was Jim Carrey's 'The Truman Show.' In it, Jim Carrey played a man whose entire life was literally 'reality TV.' A TV network had adopted him at birth and put his entire life on camera. He was a worldwide sensation; people in every nation loved watching Truman's everyday life.

Now, as you might imagine, some people outside of the TV show questioned whether it was ethical to keep a person trapped inside their own TV show for their entire life and so a 'resistance movement' grew up to get Truman out of the show. Part of their strategy was these little buttons that they would wear that said 'How's it going to end?' They wanted to get people thinking beyond the status quo and about what it would be like when the show ended.

The last chapters of Daniel do the very same thing. They invite us to look beyond our everyday existence to ask – 'how's it going to end?' What's it going to look like when all this wraps up and what should I do in the meantime?

So today we're going to look at the final chapters of Daniel and ask 'how's it going to end?' But here's the thing – chapters 10 through 12 of Daniel are some of the most hotly contested chapters in the whole of the Bible. There are a lot of moving pieces and a lot of people have very different opinions about the best way to interpret it all; rather than getting lost in the weeds, I want to give you an overview of what we know for sure. People might disagree over some of the details, but we can be certain about these things. In the end...

There will be conflict.
There will be persecution.
There will be compromise.
There will be sacrilege.
And then there will be justice.

No question about it, those things will happen at the end of the age, so let's go to Daniel and I'll show you what I mean. Join me at Daniel chapter 10.

Now Daniel chapter 10 starts with another vision. Daniel 10:1 - In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. (Dan 10:1 NIV).

What Daniel saw was so upsetting that he mourned for three weeks and fasted, asking God to show him what it all meant. Then one day, three weeks later, Daniel was standing on the bank of the Tigris River when a heavenly messenger appeared, shining like the sun, to interpret the dream.

There's a bit of back and forth, but ultimately he says to Daniel – v. 14 - 14 "Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come" (Dan 10:14 NIV).

So right away our ears should prick up – ‘this is what will happen to your people in the future, in a time yet to come.’ This is apocalyptic prophecy. What Daniel sees in the vision is a preview of the future and chapters 11 and 12 are a summary of that preview. So let’s focus there.

Daniel 11, verse 2. The messenger says - 2 "Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece.

3 Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases.

4 After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.

So far in exile, Daniel has seen two Persian kings, but three more, plus a fourth, who is richer, is yet to come. That king will get it into his head that he can do whatever he pleases, but that stirs up the Greeks. And then, from them, comes a mighty ruler who destroys them all.

Now, if you caught my Daniel 8 message – the ram and the goat – that’s this. Daniel couldn’t have known it but he was seeing a preview of the rise of Alexander the Great and his triumph over Persia. Persia lasted awhile longer after Daniel’s time but then Alexander came up and conquered Persia and much of the Middle Eastern world.

But, just as the prophecy said, his empire was broken into four pieces, each of the four being claimed not by his children but by his generals. Eventually though, the four kingdoms were reduced to two – the Seleucids in Iran and Iraq and the Ptolemys in Egypt. (Fun fact for the day – you know Antony and Cleopatra – you think Cleopatra, you think Egypt, right? Actually, Cleopatra was Greek – she was a Ptolemy who ruled Egypt, but one of only a few who bothered to actually learn the Egyptian language).

So, out of Alexander’s kingdom ultimately come two warring kingdoms – one in the North (around Iran) and one in the South (around Egypt) - and the rest of chapter 11 anticipates the ongoing conflict between them. Really, it’s a bit like a ping pong match – the kings of the North and the Kings of the South keep going back and forth through Israel on the way to attack one another and it all just becomes this never-ending cycle of conflict. Take a quick look -

Verse 6 – the king of the north will marry a princess of the south but then things go sour. The Queen loses her power but then one of her children will attack the king of the north (v. 7). Then verse 8 he’ll retreat back to Egypt (the south) but then verse 9, the king of the north will attack the south. But then he’ll retreat (again in verse) and then verses 10-11, the king of the south will gather an army and attack the north. But then verse 13, the king of the north will attack the south. It’s this ongoing back and forth, back and forth, conflict among the nations that goes on for many generations.

If you’re a history buff like me you can actually go back and map this onto actual people in real life history, but the heavenly messenger just mashes them altogether into ‘king of the north’ and ‘king of the south’ in order to say ‘look, when the end comes, there will conflict. Nations will rise against one another and then the end will come. In the end, the take away is pretty simply – in the end, there will be conflict.

Now as the passage continues, the messenger tells us that this conflict will come to a head under one ruler in particular and we find him in verse 21 – 21 "He (*another* king of the North) will be succeeded by

a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. 22 Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed” (Dan 11:21-22 NIV).

This is an especially nasty ruler and verse 36 sums him up pretty well - 36 "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. (Dan 11:36 NIV).

So in the end, there's going to be conflict, and then this leader shows up and then, verse 30:

30 Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.

31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

32 With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

33 "Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.

34 When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them.

35 Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time (Dan 11:30-35 NIV).

This is a vision of what was yet to come for Daniel's people. We've already seen that there will be conflict, but here will see that there will also be persecution, compromise, sacrilege and justice.

Let me show you what I mean. Obviously there's conflict but there's persecution too. That's verse 33 and onwards. When this ruler appears, he will attack any who do not honour him. V. 33 – many will fall by the sword, be captured or plundered.

And many will have to make a decision on what they're going to do. Verse 32 tells us that 'the people who know their God will firmly resist him.' Verse 35, 'some of the wise will stumble' (as in get knocked down) but it is only so that they may be refined and purified until the time of the end. So in the end, there will be persecution and many will stand firm...

But there will also be compromise. Verse 30 – the ruler will show favour to those who forsake the covenant. Verse 32 – with flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant. Some people will remain true to God, even in the face of persecution, but some will take the easy road and simply compromise. They will turn their backs on the God. They'll say 'better to go along than to suffer' and turn their backs on God. In the end there will be compromise.

And in the end, there will be sacrilege. Some of the people who compromise at first will probably think, oh well, he's not that bad, but then once the ruler gets going, I think that they will regret their earlier passivity. Because this final ruler is going to go whole hog into violating all that is holy about God.

We know from verse 36 that he will exalt and magnify himself above every god; verse 31 shows us how he'll do that against the true God. Verse 31, he'll 'desecrate the temple fortress and abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.'

Ultimately, this ruler wants people to worship him instead of God, and so he'll rename the temple in honour of himself, cut off the way of worship that God ordained and then set up for himself an object of worship that stands totally counter to the ways of God – he will put up an 'abomination of desolation.' He's going to spit in God's face. There will be sacrilege.

But even though this leader appears to be unstoppable, in the end there will be justice. He'll get his. The compromisers will get theirs. And the faithful get theirs too, although theirs will be a blessing.

Verse 42, we hear about the ruler getting his comeuppance - 'he will come to his end and no one will help him' – that's the justice meted out upon the big bad ruler - but chapter 12 gets into justice for everyone else.

NIV Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.

2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:1-3 NIV).

There will be justice. Those who remained faithful, despite the persecution, will go on to everlasting life. They will receive their reward for standing firm for God. But those who caved and honoured the ruler over YHWH, they go on to everlasting contempt. In the end there will be justice.

Now that's a bird's eye view of what will happen in the end and as you can see, I've left a lot out. But that's the basic framework of what Daniel saw that was 'yet to come.' In the end, there would be conflict, there would be persecution, there would be compromise, sacrilege and justice.

And in a sense, that all happened. As I've already said, you can map the back and forth of the kings of the north and south onto real people and since Israel is right in between them, they get caught up in a lot of conflict. And there WAS a big bad ruler, a king of the North, Antiochus IV. If you caught my Daniel 8 message, you'll know this guy already. He believed that he was the reincarnation of Zeus and so he raged against the gods; he stormed into Jerusalem and persecuted the Jewish people. Some stood against him and paid the price, but others caved and compromised. He ultimately forbade temple worship and even went so far as to sacrifice a pig on the altar of YHWH. That's sacrilege. And in the end, he got his – 2 Maccabees 9:5-9, NRSV[28] reports that 'God made His power known to all by causing Antiochus's body to be swarmed with worms, his flesh rotting away and reeking so badly that his army withdrew in disgust. And then he died.'

And so in a sense, as far as Daniel's vision of Israel after the exile, this has happened. The conflict, the persecution, the compromise, the sacrilege and the justice; it has all happened, but in another sense, it hasn't. There's still that rising to everlasting life or shame part. And that makes sense because this is apocalyptic prophecy. It is fulfilled in waves. What Daniel saw happened in part a few centuries later, but then there's another one coming – 'the big one.'

And the reason that I am confident in saying that is that Jesus told us that it was coming. And interestingly enough, it looks a lot like Daniel's vision. Turn with me to what's known as Jesus' apocalyptic – Matthew 24. Matthew 24, verse 3, Jesus was sitting with His disciples in view of the Temple and they say to Him – 'When will the end happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'

Jesus replied – verse 6 –

6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

So there will be? Conflict.

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

So there will be? Persecution.

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

So there will be? Compromise.

13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--

16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

So Jesus is thinking back to Daniel, anticipating 'the abomination that causes desolation and telling us that there will be sacrilege. Now Jesus doesn't say anything about a big bad like Antiochus, but who do you think sets up 'the abomination that causes desolation'? Let's pull in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 – There is a 'man of lawlessness' coming who "4 ...will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." This is Antiochus writ large; the big bad of 'big bads'; this is the Antichrist, just like Daniel anticipated.

So there's conflict, there's persecution, there's compromise and sacrilege; what about justice?

29 "Immediately after the distress of those days " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (Just like Daniel 7 – the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days)..

31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

There will be justice. God gathers His scattered people and brings them home.

Now Jesus here doesn't mention resurrection in the end but John does in Revelation 20. Verse 11, John says:

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15 NIV).

That's Daniel 12:1-3, isn't it? But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.

2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

There will be justice – the people who walked with God will be raised to life, the people who didn't, to death.

In Matthew 24, Jesus gives us a vision of the future that lines up closely with the vision that the messenger gave to Daniel. Which means that we can be sure that 'when all this is done,' there will be conflict, persecution, compromise, sacrilege and justice.

How's it going to end? With God on the throne, triumphant and ready for eternity.

Now, here's the question. What does that mean for us? What do we do in the meantime? Let me give you two thoughts.

It's going to end with God on the throne, so get ready and stand firm.

In Matthew 24, Jesus tells us what 'the end' will be like and then He says, verse 42 - 42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." He says 'get ready.' Live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so that when He comes, He will find you ready. We are ultimately saved by Jesus' righteousness alone, but God expects that we will live in light of it, applying it in our lives, sharing it with others. So live with the expectation that Jesus will return soon and make all things right. He will, so get ready.

And second, stand firm.

Daniel and Jesus both tell us that at the end, there will be persecution. The big bad ruler/the Antichrist (of which Antiochus Epiphanes was just a mini-manifestation) will come and he will do his best to persuade, connive, convince, overcome believers to compromise and give up their faith. Don't. Don't give in to a lie. Don't give in for the benefit of a short-term reprieve but instead cling to the promise of everlasting life that is awaiting all those who trust in the Lord. The trumpet shall sound and the Lord will descend and it will be well with your soul. Stand firm.

I mentioned 2 Thessalonians 2:4 – Paul talks about ‘the man of lawlessness’ setting himself up in the temple, proclaiming himself to be god. What does Paul say to do in light of it? Verse 15.

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

In the end, God will reign triumphantly and we will live with Him, so in the meantime, get ready and stand firm.

ⁱ “...making the power of God manifest to all. And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay” (2 Maccabees 9:5-9, NRSV).