

His kingdom cannot fail

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Date: 26 October 2025

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- [0:00] So let's pray. Let's ask God for his help. Father, you say in 1 Corinthians chapter 14!
- Now, I am a millennial, which basically means I haven't been cool for a very long time.
- And honestly, I get pretty confused by all the new slang that Gen Z comes up with. So when they say, you totally slayed that outfit, or he's flexing, I'll nod along, but really I've got no clue what they're talking about.
- But anyway, this week I was reading a magazine and came across another one of these new terms. Cope. Now, in normal English, cope just means learning to deal with something hard, like I'm learning to cope with the stresses of a new job.
- But in Gen Z or internet slang, cope means something a little different. It's used more like a noun, and it's something you say when you are in denial and need to avoid facing the truth.
- [1:39] So, if your football team loses, and you say, we only lost because the referee hates us, that's cope.
- Or if your investment crashes, and you start explaining how it's actually part of your long-term strategy, that is, cope. Basically, cope is what Gen Z calls the stories we tell ourselves, to make losing feel like winning.
- It's not truth, it's not reality, it's just, cope. Well, here's our question for today. Is Daniel's conviction that God's kingdom never fails, just, cope?
- Is it just a story we tell ourselves to keep ourselves from despair? I mean, think about it. The stories of Daniel 1 to 6 are almost unbelievable, aren't they?
- So, get thrown into a fiery furnace? No problem, God will definitely come to the rescue. Or, what about into a pit full of lions? No problem either.
- [2:49] God will shut your mouth. And what about those arrogant and crazy kings? Oh, don't worry, God will surely humble them all. It's always a happy ending.
- But, is real life really like that? By the time we reach Daniel 10, that is exactly the question God's people were asking. For look at chapter 10, verse 1.
- What time are we in? It's the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia. And if you know the Bible story, that is huge.
- Because in the first year of King Cyrus' reign, he's already announced that the exiles could go home and rebuild their temple. God's promise to bring his people back has come true.
- That should make everyone happy, shouldn't it? God's people are finally back in God's land to enjoy God's blessings. But two years on, it turns out that life back in the land is anything but smooth sailing.
- [4:00] Yes, they have come home and rebuilt the altar, but their new neighbours aren't exactly rolling out the welcome mat. The book of Ezra tells us they face opposition almost immediately.

And on top of that, they're just trying to survive, to put food on the table, to give their children a future. So the early excitement is all beginning to fade.

And if you are one of those returnees, you must be thinking, if life is like this, is it really true that God's kingdom never fails?

Or is that just cope? And that's not just their question, is it? Many of us know that feeling too. We're still serving, still praying, still showing up.

But sometimes life just feels hard when there's little sign God is doing anything at all. And maybe, deep down, we find ourselves wondering the same thing.

[5:07] If life is this hard, then is it really true God's kingdom never fails? And what do we do then?

Do we just cope? So how does God answer the question? What word does he give his weary people when faithfulness feels like folly?

That's exactly what Daniel 10-12 is about. Here, at the end of the book, God gives Daniel one final vision.

A message meant to steady his people for the long road of obedience. It's the longest vision of them all, stretching over three chapters.

So that means it will be impossible to look at every verse today. But, with the Spirit's help, we will try to get its main gist. And here is how this vision unfolds, generally speaking.

[6:10] Chapter 11 shows us how hard life in this world can be. Chapter 10 reminds us that even then, we are not on our own. And chapter 12 lifts our eyes to the everlasting hope that we'll never fade.

So let's dive straight into the vision of chapter 11. What does God show Daniel? Well, according to chapter 10, verse 1, it is all about a great war.

In other words, God is saying to him, Daniel, there are dark days ahead. Days of conflict, days of pain, and persecution. Why do we need to know this?

Because God wants us to see reality clearly. He wants us to know how hard life in this world can be. Life in this world won't be easy.

It can even be frightening. So it can be tempting to fall back into cold. But don't kid yourself. Ours is a world both beautiful yet deeply broken.

[7:26] And this word, Daniel insists again in 10 verse 1, is true. And to show us just how broken our world really is, this vision walks us through a long, messy history.

Basically, it is a rerun of Daniel chapter 8, but with even more detail. Now, do you remember what Daniel 8 looked at? It zoomed in on two kingdoms that came after Babylon, Persia, and Greece, and focused heavily on a specific wicked ruler who would rise from the Greek empire, Antiochus IV.

And chapter 11 will now revisit that exact same period and expand on it. And as we skim through this history, remember, we are not just collecting facts about ancient kings.

We are getting a vivid flavour of what life in our world is genuinely like. So let's look at some highlights, or perhaps more accurately, lowlights.

I'll skip over verses 2 to 4 because if you've heard me on Daniel 8, you already know this part. First, Persia arises, followed by Greece, which eventually splinters into four kingdoms.

[8:50] But after that, we begin to enter new territory. Because now we begin to hear about centuries of conflict, power plays, and shifting alliances between what chapter 11 calls the kings of the north and the kings of the south.

That is the Seleucids up north in Syria and the Ptolemies down south in Egypt. You can see a map on the screen.

And basically, verses 5 to 19 reveal these two kingdoms are locked in a never-ending tug of war for control and supremacy. So let me give you a taste of what's going on.

Down south, Egypt is ruled by a man named Ptolemy II and he's got this bright idea for how to keep peace with the northern kingdom. He decides to try a bit of romantic diplomacy.

Around 250 BC, he gives his daughter, Berenice, in marriage to Antiochus II, the king up north in Syria. And the deal is very simple.

[10:04] If Berenice marries Antiochus, then her son will inherit the throne and unite everyone. Sounds good, right? Only one small problem.

Antiochus is already married. But that doesn't bother him. He just banishes his wife. Laodice, problems solved.

For a while, it seems to work. But when Berenice's father dies, Antiochus changes his mind. He divorces Berenice and takes Laodice back.

But oops, Laodice isn't the forgiving type. She poisons Antiochus, has Berenice and her little boy killed, and installs her own son, Seleucus II, as king.

But it doesn't end there, of course, because her ex set off another war. Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III, isn't going to let this slide, and so he marches north, defeats the Seleucid army, and kills Laodice in revenge.

[11:18] And, if you keep reading these verses with the history books open alongside you, you will discover that is just the beginning. These kings will keep being offended and fighting one another in all sorts of bloodthirsty wars for decades and decades to come.

And there will be yet more daughters who are married off and end up betraying their fathers, and so on and so forth. It is full of horrible behavior. And what is amazing is that the Bible foretells all of this with great accuracy.

No one disputes this. But why is this vision so interested in describing all these wars? What's the reason?

Well, let us have a simple geography lesson. Do you know which city lies between the north and the south? answer?

Jerusalem. God's people. And that means for the next few centuries, they are caught right in between. Sometimes they are ruled by the north, sometimes they are controlled by the south, but the point is whichever way it is, life is difficult.

[12:40] They're just trying to be quietly faithful to God and mind their own business, but unfortunately they still end up as pawns, as collateral damage.

That is how hard life in this world can be. Not because we make it difficult for ourselves, but because godless people make it difficult for us.

And sometimes it will get especially frightening. In verse 21, we read about the rise of a contemptible person.

That is Antiochus IV. We've already met him back in Daniel 8. He is a Seleucid king, that is the ones in the north, and he is especially monstrous.

Remember him? This is the guy who called himself God made manifest. And in verses 25 onwards, this vision describes one particularly horrific event.

[13:48] You see, somewhere along the lines, Antiochus decided to attack Egypt. But the Romans, that's the ships mentioned in verse 30, appeared and joined forces with the Egyptians, utterly humiliating him.

It's actually quite an interesting story, so if you have time later on, you can look up the Wikipedia link that I've put on the handout to read all about it. But anyway, Antiochus was forced to retreat, which made him really, really angry.

And guess which city lay right on his way home? That's right, Jerusalem. So he took out all of his anger on the Jews.

That's what verse 30 is describing. His troops stormed the temple, stopped the daily sacrifices, and then verse 31, set up the abomination that causes desolation.

that's when he put up a statue of Zeus in God's temple, and to top it all off, he sacrificed a pig on the altar itself.

[14:59] So, do you see? As long as we live, life in this world can be hard. We can be subject to the whims of unpredictable, angry tyrants.

As verse 33 puts it, you can be wise and still fall to the sword and be burned or captured or plundered. And again, this isn't just true of this historical period.

In verses 36 to 45, the vision seems to move beyond Antiochus to an even more terrifying figure. I say this because this king is described as doing things in these verses that Antiochus wasn't actually known to do historically.

Now, these verses are debated as you can imagine, but one suggestion I found helpful is to understand them in a similar way to some of David's psalms.

You see, sometimes David will begin a psalm by reflecting on his role as the Davidic king, doesn't he? But by the end, his descriptions will become so grand and elevated, you know he is speaking about someone far greater than himself, the greater David, Jesus.

[16:26] And that seems to be happening here only in reverse. Verse 21 begins with the historical figure of Antiochus IV, but from verse 36 onwards, the language begins to rise and intensify, and by the end, we appear to be talking about an even worse version of Antiochus, an ultimate final villain.

Many believe this figure points ahead to what Paul calls the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2. But here's the big point, whoever this figure turns out to be.

As long as we live, this world can be hard. There will always be powers that oppose God and people who suffer because they belong to him.

There will always be world events and global leaders who do all sorts of terrible things that end up hurting others, including Christians, and there is no way out.

not every church wants to say that out loud. It is not exactly inspirational, but the Bible does because the Bible isn't trying to sell you superficial comfort.

[17:52] It's offering you truth. It doesn't give us hope or fairy tales to help us escape reality, but it does give us something better.

a God who tells us the truth about our world and then walks with us through it. And that's exactly what Daniel 10-12 wants to show us next.

You see, God isn't here just to say, oh well, life's tough, too bad, just get on with it and bear with it. No, he says instead, take heart, be strong and courageous because you are not on your own.

You are not on your own. And that's the second thing Daniel 10-12 wants to teach us today. You see, I wonder when you first read chapter 10, whether you thought, wow, Daniel's really taking his time to get to the point, huh?

Because if you've been following along in chapters 7-9, you will know the usual pattern. Daniel gets a vision and boom, we are straight away told what he sees.

[19:13] But here, it's different, isn't it? Chapter 10 slows everything down. It lingers. We get this long, winding introduction before the vision even begins in chapter 11.

So why? what's going on? Why take the scenic route this time? Well, let me show you why. First of all, did you notice how Daniel is feeling?

Look at verse 2. He mourns for three weeks. In fact, verse 3, he denies himself delicacies, meat, and alcohol, and he doesn't annoy himself.

that's what the reference to using no lotions refers to. In other words, he is not rejoicing in any way. In fact, given that it is the first month, verse 4 tells us, that means he must have chosen not to celebrate Passover, which happened on that very same month.

That's like you choosing not to celebrate Christmas or Chinese New Year or Gawai. Because as he experiences how hard the world can be, how can he find joy?

[20:40] So instead, he seeks more understanding. Verse 12 tells us he's praying again. And here is where the encouragement comes.

God answers not just with words, but with a person. In verse 5, Daniel sees a man.

And for the remainder of the chapters, he is always there. If you jump ahead to chapter 12, verses 6 and 7, you can see he's been sticking around. And look carefully at how he's described, chapter 10, verses 5 and 6.

He is dressed in linen. Now, linen is white, it is pure. It's what the priestly garments were made of in Leviticus 16.

Immediately, this suggests that this is someone pure and special. And he has a belt of fine gold from uphas around his waist.

[21:43] That's where the finest gold came from. It's an emblem of royalty. And his face is like lightning. Now, just imagine a lightning flashing in the sky right now.

It's this big streak of brightness, isn't it? But, that's just a flash. It only appears for a second. This is a face constantly like lightning.

It's glorious. How will you bear it? And then there's his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude, deafening, roaring, thundering.

So, this guy is special. But who is he? Is he the angel Gabriel?

But if so, why doesn't Daniel just say so? After all, he calls Gabriel by name in Daniel 9, so why not here? No, clearly this person is set apart from Gabriel.

[23:00] Is it God himself? Many think so, and I can see why. I am very close to doing so myself.

But verse 13 is what gives me pause. You see, this man says he needs Michael's help to hold a fought against enemy forces. Now, does God really need help in that way?

I'm not so sure. So that's why I hesitate. But what is clear is that this man is, at the very least, God's representative.

And that's how I will describe him. He is someone so closely identified with God that everything he says and does carries divine wake. And if you have read Revelation 1, you might notice something familiar.

because this description sounds a lot like how Jesus himself is described there. And through his representative, God wants to tell us even though life in this world is hard, you are not on your own.

[24:18] And he tells us this in three ways. firstly, he says, I love you. I love you. Do you see that in verse 11?

Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I'm about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.

And again, down in verse 19, he uses the same language. And what does highly esteemed mean? You might remember from last week.

It's to be greatly loved. That's how the ESV translates it. That's the sense. That's what this representative says to Daniel.

Twice. Not you could be loved, but you are loved. and you know what?

[25 : 22] God says that to you too. Perhaps today you are feeling small, forgotten, overwhelmed.

You know all too well this world can be very cruel and unjust, and it's even harder when you're trying to live for God, not yourself.

yourself. That's what Daniel was feeling. And it is in the midst of his weakness, not in the midst of his strength, that God's word comes.

You are greatly loved. Do you believe that about yourself? You see, when God says that to Daniel, he doesn't do so because he's so impressed by Daniel's prayers and actions, that's not it.

Rather, it's because he is affirming what has always been true, that Daniel is deeply, personally, covenantally loved by the Lord.

[26 : 31] And this is not cope. This is not sentimental fluff. This is the deepest reality of the universe.

God loves his children. Even when we find this world a very difficult place to live, perhaps especially when we find this world a difficult place to live, God says to us, I still love you.

You matter to me. And we know that even better than Daniel because we know who this divine representative points to, the Lord Jesus himself.

And he has proven beyond all doubt God loves us because he sacrificed himself for us. For the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Then secondly, God says, I'm strengthening you. I'm strengthening you. Take a look at Daniel again, verses 9 and 10.

[27 : 52] He's face down. I'm all alone, he says. I have no strength. My face is deathly pale. Or check out verses 15 to 17.

I'm in anguish, he cries out. My strength is gone. I can hardly breathe. Life is just too hard. I can't go on.

And what happens next is one of the most beautiful moments in the whole book. A hand touches him. Verse 10. It's not loud.

It's not dramatic. Just a simple human gesture of care. And that touch begins to lift him.

Not all the way up yet, but just enough to breathe again. Then it happens again. Verse 16. One in the likeness of a man touched my lips.

[28 : 58] This divine person, he doesn't shout from a distance. He draws near. Daniel his voice back. And this time, Daniel can finally speak.

And then one more time, verse 18. Another touch. This time, the touch doesn't just steady him, it strengthens him.

It is like life is flowing back into his trembling frame. until finally, Daniel says, verse 19, I was strengthened.

And my brothers and sisters, that's how God often strengthens his people. Not through a single dramatic moment, but through patient, repeated, loving care.

he knows we can't stand all at once, so he meets us where we are. He gives strength to the weary, he gives courage back to our hearts, he says, peace, be strong now, be strong.

[30 : 19] And maybe that's what some of us need to hear today. You are tired, you have been carrying more than you can bear, you don't even know how to get back up again.

Seeking to follow God has been a real struggle. But the same God who touched Daniel still reaches out to strengthen his people.

He does it through his word, he does it through his spirit, he does it through his people around you. And when he does, life begins to return.

So when you can't lift your head, don't lose heart. Because the hand of Jesus is still reaching out to you. For thirdly, God says, I'm fighting for you.

I'm fighting for you. You see, God says, do you really want to know what's going on? Let me give you a peek. Look at verse 13 and what this divine representative says.

[31:34] The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief priests came to help me because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

And then if you go on to look at verse 20, soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia and when I go the prince of Greece will come.

So what is going on? It appears God is giving Daniel a glimpse into the spiritual realm where there is some kind of angelic battle, a struggle between God's heavenly messengers and the forces of darkness.

For these princes are clearly not human but supernatural powers. And that's not an idea unique to Daniel. We see glimpses of this kind of cosmic conflict elsewhere in scripture like in Revelation 12 or Ephesians 6 where Paul talks about struggles against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil.

Now because of this passage some teachers perhaps most famously a man named C. Peter Wagner in the late 80s and early 90s began to argue that this proves the existence of territorial spirits and the need for what is called strategic level spiritual warfare.

[33:12] So the basic idea goes something like this. Every nation, every city, perhaps even every neighbourhood is said to be under the grip of certain dark spiritual powers, forces that keep people from hearing and believing the gospel.

And according to this view, our job as Christians is to confront those spirits directly, to name them and fight them through prayer and to seek revelation and break their holes so that the gospel can advance.

It is a view that still has some influence in Malaysian churches. And these teachers are absolutely right to see! something spiritual here.

There really are dark powers that work behind the scenes of human history. They might even possibly from time to time be attached to specific places influencing whole communities and nations.

Maybe that's why we have school stabbings and racial riots.! They encourage such things. But here is the thing.

[34:24] Daniel 10 doesn't show Daniel fighting them. He doesn't bind them, name them, map them, or even pray against them.

In fact, the battle between God's messengers and these dark powers is already underway before Daniel even knows about it. This divine representative only tells him about it afterwards to explain why the answer to his prayer took three weeks to arrive.

So Daniel is not being recruited into some cosmic war. No, the big truth of Daniel 10 is not Daniel go fight for me against these evil spirits.

It is the opposite. God is saying I'm fighting for you. You see, here is what God is showing us.

Even when our prayers seem to hit a wall, God's messengers are still on the move. Even when we weigh in weakness, God is protecting us from the devil.

- [35 : 40] No matter how hard life in this world can be, God is never indifferent. We are not on our own. No, his angels are fighting on our behalf even when we don't see it.
- And actually, victory is won already. Colossians 2, verse 15 tells us that happened at the cross. But God isn't quite done yet.
- Because you see, even if he loves, strengthens and fights for us, what use is it if the world remains broken forever?
- What use is it if the world will always remain a frightening place, filled with people like Antiochus? What use is it if you do the right thing, stand up for the right thing, and even die for the right thing, but nothing changes?
- wouldn't that ultimately be foolish? And God says, fair question, but I do have an answer for you, and that is the third thing God wants to lift our eyes to today, the everlasting hope that will never fade, the everlasting hope that will never fade.
- [37 : 07] Look at 12, verse 1. God says, there will be deliverance for every single one of God's people, even in times of distress.
- But here is the big surprise. This deliverance isn't so much just for people who are in the fiery furnace, or the lion's den.
- This deliverance is for those who have already been burned by the fire, or already been eaten by the lions. Because this deliverance reaches even beyond death itself.
- Just look with me at 12, verse 2 to 3. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.
- Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars, forever and ever. In short, God says, one day there will be resurrection.
- [38 : 18] Every person who has ever lived will stand before God. Jesus himself repeats this teaching in John 5. He says, for a time is coming when all who are in their grace will hear his voice and come out.
- Those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. And so God is saying, yes, for the moment, Satan is still around.
- Sin is still around. That's why the world will feel so broken, so dark, so hard at times. And yes, sometimes Christians will face troubles, perhaps be persecuted, and they won't find relief in this life.
- They die, sometimes horribly. But God knows his people. He's written their names down with the very blood of Christ.
- And he will rescue every single one of them. He will raise them up so that they might share in his forever. And you have to remember, this might sound familiar to us, but to Daniel, this is all brand new.
- [39 : 43] Nowhere in the book of Daniel, and really in the Old Testament, has God ever said anything like this before. But now he is telling us, my kingdom never fails.
- And you know that better than Daniel ever did. because you know Christ has risen from the dead. So, be wise.
- That is the call to us today. I wonder if you've noticed something interesting. In 12 verse 2 to 3, as well as verse 10, the contrast is between the wicked and the wise.
- Now, that is surprising. We would have expected the contrast to be between the wicked and the righteous. Right? But Daniel says you're either wicked or wise.
- Why? Let's figure this out. Think back to the first half of the book. Take Daniel chapter 5, for example. What happens when King Belshazzar defies God?

[40 : 58] He's judged and killed that very night. So what is the wise thing to do? Humble yourselves before God. The cause and effect is clear.

In Daniel 1 to 6, being on God's side is clearly the wisest option. But now, jump ahead to Daniel 7 to 12, and that cause and effect is not so clear anymore.

For example, look at 11 verse 32. When Antiochus rises and God's people resist him, what happens?

Verse 33 tells us they fall by the sword or by flame or captivity or plunder. So now we have to ask, what is so wise about that?

Isn't it the ones who compromise with Antiochus, the ones who survive? Aren't they the smart ones? Suddenly, it seems foolish to be on God's side.

[42 : 09] But God says, not if you know Daniel 12 verse 1, 2, 3. Because when you know that God will one day raise the dead and hold every life to account, then you understand why those who resist in 11 verse 32 and 33 are called the wise.

They are on the right side after all. You see, true wisdom isn't measured by short-term safety, but by eternal faithfulness.

It is those who persevere for the Lord who will inherit the everlasting hope that will never fade. the cause and effect is still clear, but it has to be seen in light of resurrection.

So my brothers and sisters, because God's kingdom cannot fail, be wise. will be hardship for a time, but only for a time.

That seems to be the point of the various numbers we find at the end of Daniel. But until then, as Dr. Carl Esri, our church camp speaker this year, puts it, stand firm through the storms of history with a confident hope in the resurrection to come.

[43 : 44] Stand firm recognizing, 11 verse 35, that these hardships are there to refine and purify us. Don't go down the path of the wicked and be condemned.

No, keep praying like Daniel does in chapter 10. And then shine like the stars, 12 verse 3, so that you might bring to others the light of the gospel.

And then, hold on to the promise of 1 Peter 5 verse 10 to 11, that the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. This is the message of Daniel 10 to 12. In a sense, it is the message of the whole book.

Let's pay attention. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that even through a difficult vision like the one we just read, you do have a message for us.

[45 : 12] And so Father, I just pray that you would help us, especially if we find life hard at the moment, to know that you are with us, you love us, you are strengthening us, you are fighting for us.

Help us to persevere until that final day when we know with confidence we will enjoy a world that is unbroken, that is no longer filled with injustice, that is finally fixed once and for all.

But Father, help us also to pay attention to the implied warning of this passage, that if we choose to do what is wicked, what is evil, what is wrong in your eyes, we will also be raised, but raised to condemnation.

So Lord, please Lord, help us to cling to Jesus, help us to cling to our only hope, and help us to look forward to that day when we can be with you.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.