



Have you ever heard of Wonderland? It's not Disneyland or Disney World. It's the effort to make something like Disney World fly in China. A developer purchased land twenty miles from Beijing and set out to create a Chinese knock-off to the wonderful world of Disney. His plans included large castles, spectacular rides, and everything to make it one of the greatest theme parks in Asia. But the price of land and other struggles caused Wonderland to become a different kind of wonder. Today it is mostly cornfields. Behind rows of cornstalks are the magnificent brick castles and various skeletons of abandoned structures. Oddly enough some people do make the visit to the site of Wonderland. They don't come, however, to see it in all its glory. They are fascinated by the unusual sight of middle to lower-class farmers working the land with all the dilapidated Disney-like buildings surrounding them. There is no happily ever-after in Wonderland unless you're into agriculture and reclaiming land for farming. That's a familiar type of story. Even if you never heard of Wonderland you've heard of things which have come and gone quickly. When we hear the phrase "happily ever after," we can only sigh, "If only that were ever true." Kingdoms fall—real kingdoms and make-believe fantasy-fun-lands alike. But God's kingdom is different. Today we see that he has plans for his kingdom to outlast all expectations. We will take one more look at the book of Daniel as we wrap up our series, "The King and Life Forever After." And we see just how our King comes to rule forever.

Kingdoms come and go. Daniel and his companions knew that as well as anybody. He grew up in the land of Israel. It was during his childhood that the king of Jerusalem defied the king of Babylon. With great confidence he reasoned God would never let Judah and Jerusalem fall. When Daniel was a youth many were foolishly saying, "Disaster will never overtake us." They were convinced that the city of Jerusalem along with its temple would never be overthrown. Not even the armies of the Babylonians chipping away at their nation could convince them otherwise. But when Daniel was young, he witnessed the downfall of Jerusalem. Armies invaded from Babylon and took people captive. Daniel couldn't remain secure in that kingdom; he was carted off into exile into Babylon. News came a few years later that the city of Jerusalem had been completely destroyed. The temple had been utterly ruined and leveled. There was only a trace of what was once Jerusalem in its glory with the temple of the Lord. They had stood for over 400 years, stretching back to the time of David and Solomon. Now they were gone. Now only scattered grain fields grew where once stood the walls and towers of ancient days. Kingdoms of this world -no matter how grand- fall.

Israel was hardly alone in this matter. Just as Daniel prophesied that the kingdom which had conquered Israel would itself be conquered. That kingdom in turn would be conquered. Still another would conquer them. That's the way this world has always been. We still see the rise and fall of nations today. Just as business endeavors eventually crash and fail, so do nations and all kingdoms. This world is full of short-lived dreams.

We know nothing lasts, but we still struggle to envision things we know coming to an end. In the early 1800s many laughed at the idea that a locomotive could ever outperform a stagecoach. In 1865 a Boston newspaper said, "Well informed people know it would be impossible to transmit the human voice over wires (and replace the need for Morse code)." In 1903 the New York Times predicted that the automobile, which was mostly considered a novelty and toy for the rich, couldn't ever replace the horse. You get the point. We are short-sighted beings that struggle to fathom a whole-different type of world and we hesitate to envision the end of an era. People might laugh at the idea or suggestion that things will not go on as they always have; but they most certainly cannot and will not.

With similar short-sightedness of those before us we are tempted to live as if our own little kingdoms will never fail. We end up placing all our effort, our time, our heart into things that cannot last. But just as business endeavors, nations, and all things eventually come to their end, so will our own designs. Where do you place your hope? Is it sometimes in the home you own? That will not last. Is it in the relationship with someone you love? They will not remain at your side forever. Is it your investments or life-savings? Those too will one day prove to be worth nothing. Finally, our bodies are temples that will return to dust. They will not stand against the test of time. To put our hope in the things of this world and kingdoms of this world is to put our hope in something doomed to failure and loss. You can try to build a perfect slice of Eden, but you can't live happily ever after in this world. "Happily ever after" is sadly ever out of our reach.

That's because this world and all its kingdoms are under a curse. That same curse blankets every kingdom, every organization, every nation, every tribe and language. It is the curse that comes from the wicked heart of mankind. It's the reason that kingdoms topple kingdoms. It leads to fighting against nations. It leads to fighting against neighbors. And it leads us all to fighting against our God. So, this world and all its kingdoms remain under God's curse on his enemies. No nation, and no man could ever fix that. We need more than a lasting kingdom. We need a king who can rescue us from this curse and from our own wicked hearts that destroy every kingdom we build.

In Daniel's vision he sees something out of this world entering into the picture. Happily, ever after is not out of our reach because of someone who reached down to us. His vision shows kingdom after kingdom coming out of the sea and growing up from the earth. The rise from the sea and they drown back in it. They come from the dust and they return to it.

He sees kingdom topple kingdom. It would all leave one in despair if that's all he ever saw. Especially after the destruction of God's temple and hearing about the future suffering of God's people under these kingdoms. But now he sees someone coming from a different place. The beast and creatures that represented kingdoms in his vision didn't last. But now he sees one like a man. And he is coming from a different place. He is coming on the clouds of heaven.

Only this man could bring about what we need. Daniel sees him as one "like a son of man." He sees a figure of what appears to be human. Only this human is no ordinary man. When Jesus was born, he was completely unique. He is the only one born who is without beginning. Standing in the presence of the Father, the Ancient of Days, he is eternal. He knows nothing of having a beginning or an end. He is a king like no other. And that is why when he came to this world and took on human flesh, he could establish a kingdom like no other. He is the only man ever born that didn't by nature fight against man and fight against God. He was born of the virgin -without a wicked heart passed on from an earthly father. That is the one who Daniel sees in his vision. It is Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father who took on human flesh to become "like a son of man."

The reason he appeared in human flesh and was born into this world was establish a lasting kingdom. To build his kingdom he chooses to bring us into freedom from the curse. He was cursed on a tree as he hung there in our place. The sign above his head on the cross read, "This is Jesus (the man) of Nazareth, King of the Jews." And that was not the end of his reign. It was the beginning of his kingly reign over his people.

When Jesus was on trial, he was questioned about who he was. He did not deny it but spoke very plainly that he is the Son of God and that one day he would fulfill Daniel's vision by coming again in glory with the clouds of heaven and all his angels. Pilate asked him "you are king, then?" Jesus replied, "I am as you say... but my kingdom is not of this world."

When our king Jesus was placed in his tomb it couldn't hold him. He rose back to life. His is the one story that could not end in defeat. His was the first story ever written. Before time began the plan was all laid out. He would die for sinners but rise again to life. Daniel's vision includes seeing him in his glory. Ascended in glory to the right hand of the Father Jesus stands now in victory. He said after rising to life, "all authority has been given to me." Jesus fulfills what Daniel sees with the Son of Man receiving all authority, glory, and sovereign power as he is ushered into the presence of the Father. After he suffered and died the risen Jesus returned to glory and once again, now with glorified flesh, rules over all.

Daniel sees in his vision the time when that scene becomes evident for all. After the dead are all raised, they will see him. One who looks like a man but is holding all authority, glory, and power. Jesus will come with all his glory with all his angels. "All nations and people of every language worshipped him." That will be fulfilled on the day when he comes visibly in all his glory. The prophecy will match what the apostle Paul wrote about the end, "Every tongue will confess, and everyone acknowledge that Jesus is Lord." No other king and no other kingdom has or will ever achieve such heights. Jesus is worshipped by all, holds all glory, all power, and all authority because he is true God.

When the day of his return comes, he will topple every kingdom. The words of Psalm 2 will be fulfilled regarding the Son of God. ¹ *Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?* ² *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,* ³ *"Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles."* ⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.* ⁵ *He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,* ⁶ *"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."* ⁷ *I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father.* ⁸ *Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.* ⁹ *You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."* ¹⁰ *Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.* ¹¹ *Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling.* ¹² *Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."* (Psalm 2)

Then every kingdom, every organization, every tribe and nation will meet its end. And all those who now confess him as Lord and trust in him are already part of his kingdom. That is the one kingdom that will never end. It includes everyone around the world who now call on his name. That includes people from all the nations of this world and people from many nations before. Someone shared an interesting video on social media that included a hymn being sung by several different singers who spoke several different languages. That's a small picture of what God's kingdom entails. Imagine if you can all the different languages ever spoken and all the different nations around the world. Imagine countless crowds gathered together in that kingdom.

In that kingdom there, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." We will live with him there in his kingdom forever! Then what we have always longed for and dreamed of will be true. We will live with our king happily ever after.