

The End of Time

by Kevin Beck , Jan 30, 2005

“Everything that has a beginning has an end.” You might be tempted to think that this quotation comes from the Bible—most likely from the Book of Revelation. However, if you’re familiar with Neo, Morpheus, and The Oracle, you recognize the phrase from the movie *The Matrix Revolutions*.



“Everything that has a beginning has an end” sounds as biblical as the old saying, “God helps them that help themselves.” But just because something sounds biblical doesn’t mean that it is biblical. Popular theology and pop culture looks to the bible (as especially the Book of Revelation) to seek signs pointing to the end of time. The theory goes that time began in Genesis and will be wrapped up in Revelation. But the concept of the end of time simply is not biblical.

It has been well documented that while the Bible never employs the phrase “the end of time,” it does refer to “the time of the end.” What’s the difference? All the difference in the world.

Consider this. The time can come for an event to end without time itself ending. The clock runs out during a football game. The school bell rings. A baby is born. The time for playing, studying, and gestating all reach an appointed climax, yet time itself continues.

If we can determine, therefore, what the bible means when it discusses the ‘time of the end,’ we might be able to conclude that the end-time can reach its goal without time itself ending. Let’s take a whirlwind tour through the Bible and see how its writers spoke of ‘the end.’

The End in the Law

We can start with Moses. In his farewell address (Deuteronomy 28-32), Moses spoke to Israel as they were about to enter into the Promised Land. He instructed them on the importance of adhering to the covenant that they and God had made at Sinai, and he informed them of the consequences of breaking that covenant. As the nation’s leader for a generation, Moses harbored no illusions of Israel’s potential. They rebelled in his presence, how much more so after his death?

Their defiance of the covenant and of God (particularly through idolatry) would result in their utter corruption. Subsequently, they would encounter trouble in the latter time (31:29). Moses called heaven and earth to witness his speech in which he contrasts God’s faithfulness to the nation’s infidelity. Their idolatry would end in disasters, pestilences, and destruction. Moses wept, hoping beyond hope, that the nation would consider what its end would be (32:29). Nevertheless, God would be merciful, redeem Israel, and open the way for the Gentiles to share in the covenantal blessings (32:43).

The point: Moses' concept of the 'end' referred to the end of Israel under the Old Covenant made at Sinai—not the end of time. After the end, peoples of all ethnicities (Jews and Gentiles alike) would rejoice thanks to the forgiveness God extended.

The End in Daniel

In Daniel where we find no less than eight references to the time of the end (two in chapter 8, three in chapter 11, and three in chapter 12). In each case, nothing suggests the end of time is the topic in question. In fact, when Daniel writes of “the end”, we may rightly ask, “The end of what?”

In Daniel 9:24-27, the text speaks of a symbolic seventy weeks time period for Israel and her holy city. At the pinnacle of the seventy weeks, Israel's transgression would be finished, and her sin would come to an end. At that same occasion, the city would be destroyed and the sanctuary would cease along with sacrifice and offering.

Here Daniel envisioned the end of the Old Covenant system and Israel's covenantal trespass under that system that could not be removed by the temple's sacrificial practices. Daniel echoes Jeremiah's expectation of the arrival of a New Covenant (see Daniel 9:1 and Jeremiah 31). The New Covenant would usher in an era of fulfilled grace and broad forgiveness. “After those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Notice that Jeremiah (like Moses in Deuteronomy) envisioned a *time* after the end, a time in which God would dwell within humanity. This would be a time when people would exist and know God “from the least of them to the greatest...for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34). Both prophets foresaw the end of Old Covenant transgression and the end of separation from God's presence.

Now, in Daniel 12, Daniel is told that his vision would be sealed until the time of the end. Daniel then witnessed two men speaking, and one asked, “How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?” Daniel is told the end would be marked “when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished” (“accomplished” is the same Hebrew word as “end”). Confused, Daniel asks, “My lord, what shall be the outcome [same Hebrew word as ‘end’] of these things?” The angelic messenger advises Daniel that it would all be revealed at the time of the end. Daniel, then, receives coded information concerning large symbolic numbers of days. Nevertheless, he should go his way until he received his inheritance “at the end of the days.”

An overview of Daniel 12 reveals that the end relates to the fulfillment of Daniel's vision, which would occur when the holy people's power would be broken. At the end of the symbolic time period, Daniel would receive his reward. The 'end,' therefore, correlates to the realization of Daniel's revelation, the end of Israel's brokenness, and the consummation of the symbolic stretch of time—not the finality of time itself.

Jesus and the End

Jesus as a Second Temple Jew was steeped in the Law and the prophets. Jesus knew both Moses and Daniel, and Jesus employed their 'end' language by applying it to his own day.

Shortly before the crucifixion, Jesus' disciples admired the Jerusalem temple. Jesus warned them that the temple would eventually be torn down. Curious, the disciples asked Jesus when this would happen as they linked this event to "the end of the age." This is the same age-ending time that Moses and Daniel looked toward.

Jesus instructed his disciples that they would hear of all sorts of wars, yet the end was not yet. Persecution would increase and so would Law breaking. Yet those who persevered until the end would receive their reward. At the same time, the kingdom message would spread amongst the gentiles permitting them to be blessed too (just as Moses predicted). At this point, the end will come.

Jesus specifically quoted Daniel (in 24:15) to alert his original audience to the arrival of the end. As the ancient Judeans observed certain events, they were to head for the hills—literally. Jesus pronounced to his original audience that they would be the ones witnessing the end, "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place (fulfilled, ended)" (24:34).

From there, Jesus again echoed Daniel. He told the disciples on the Mount of Olives that the end would be similar to what Noah experienced. Daniel used this language when discussing the demolition of the city and the sanctuary, "Its end shall come with a flood" (Daniel 9:26).

To summarize, Jesus anticipated an end that would come within the lifetime of his original disciples. It included the fall of Jerusalem and the flattening of the temple. To escape the devastation that would accompany the end, those living in the environs of Jerusalem were to hide in the nearby mountains. This end, therefore, is not the end of time. It was the end of the Old Covenant arrangement that was housed in the Jerusalem temple. This end reached its acme in the Roman-Jewish War.

The End in Peter and Jude

The apostle Peter stood on the Mount of Olives listening as Jesus spoke about the end. Peter took that information and communicated it in both of his New Testament letters.

In 1Peter 1:20, he said that Jesus was "destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake." Here Peter equates the work of Jesus as occurring during the end time (we'll see this again in the Book of Revelation). Later in that same letter, Peter became more specific about the arrival of the end. In 1Peter 4:7, he wrote, "The end of all things is near." If Peter believed that the end of time was at hand 2,000 years ago, he was patently mistaken. However, if Peter looked forward to the imminent end of the Old Covenant system, the temple, and the city of Jerusalem, then he was correct anticipating the immediacy of the consummation of all things.

Peter had this same end in mind as he wrote 2Peter. In 3:1-2, he stated that his letter was intended to remind his original readers what the prophets (including Daniel), Jesus (in the gospels), and the apostles (including himself) had already taught. He referred to scoffers whose presence indicated arrival of the end time. Then he (like Daniel and Jesus) spoke of the end's arrival in terms of a flood. Poetically, Peter foretold of the end of one world and the beginning of another—not of the space-time universe, but of two contrasting covenantal orders. Peter concluded his letter by advising his original audience to look for and hasten the arrival of the end.

Jude's pithy letter resembles Peter's. Like Peter, Jude reminded his readers of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles concerning the presence of mockers. These scoffers served to prove that Jude and his audience were living in the end time 2,000 years ago.

Both Peter and Jude follow in the footsteps of Moses, Daniel, and Jesus in picturing the end as covenantal transformation—the old heaven and earth were currently passing, and the new would soon arrive. Additionally, they both considered themselves to be living in the generation that would witness the end—not the end of time, but the end of the Old Covenant.

The End in John

John, like Peter, listened to Jesus on the Mount of Olives elucidate about the end. And John, too, wrote about the end in his New Testament letters.

In 1John 2:18, he proclaimed, "It is the last hour!" John believed in the palpable imminence of the end. It was not to be a drawn-out ordeal covering two millennia. It was right around the corner.

Also like Peter and Jude, John pointed to the active opposition he was facing as proof positive of the proximity of the end. John expected that he and his readers would see the end's arrival (3:2-3).

As the author of the Book of Revelation, John spoke of the end. In writing to the church in Thyatira, John encouraged them to remain steadfast until the end. He expected this group of people to witness the end.

As the Book of Revelation develops, we read of war, plague, and death (just as Moses had said). It reaches a point where people cry out to the rocks and mountains to cover them (6:15-16). This particular incident comes directly from Jesus' statement on his way to the cross in Luke 23:28-31. Here, Jesus advised the Daughters of Jerusalem not to weep over his death, but to wail for themselves and their children—the current generation. They would face a disaster so terrible that they would cry for the mountains to hide them. Such a disaster befell Jerusalem during the Roman-Jewish War.

The Book of Revelation concludes with the old heaven and earth fleeing away from the one sitting on the throne and the new heaven and earth arriving in their fullness. This

image reverberates with images from Moses who called heaven and earth to witness his covenant affirmation. It also rings of Daniel 7 where the Ancient of Days brings the old order of things to an end and inaugurates a new arrangement—one in which the people of God would partake in the kingdom of God.

This new order hearkens back to what Moses spoke of, “The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them” (Revelation 21:3). Time itself has not ceased in this new arrangement. Instead, God and humanity live in a reconciled state where the nations receive healing and the servants of God serve him.

Additionally, John personalizes the end in the Book of Revelation. Three times, John quotes Jesus, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). For John (like Peter), Jesus’ work framed the end time. Indeed, Jesus *was* the end (the goal) of all things; he was God’s fulfillment of the covenantal promises to usher in forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation.

Summary

Everything that has a beginning has an end. While the proverb may come from *The Matrix*, the sentiment is biblical. The Old Covenant had a beginning (Sinai), and it had an end. Outwardly, the end came in the fall of Jerusalem. On a deeper level, the end reached its terminus in Jesus Christ.

Will time ever end? Only time will tell—because the bible does not.