

Days Yet to Come
Israel's Future and Ours in Daniel 10–12

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Looking Back and Looking Forward

Shall we read from the prophecy by Daniel beginning in chapter 10.

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz round his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, 'O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.' And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. 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. The 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, and 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.*' (vv. 4-14)

Now chapter 12, please.

'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. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.' Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. And someone said to the man clothed in linen, *who was above the waters of the stream*, 'How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?' And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven and swore by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, 'O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?' He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many

shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.' (vv. 1–12)

May God use his holy word to give us that wisdom of which it speaks.

Remembering the past

I cannot tell you for sure what mood Daniel the great prophet eventually found himself in, standing by the banks of the great river Hiddekel. I fancy there could have been a tinge of melancholy in his heart.

It was no little canal, like the canal Ulai at which he had had a previous vision; Hiddekel was the great river Tigris, one of the two famous rivers that still run through that part of the Middle East to this day. For Daniel, they represented the great world empires as he had always known them. The Hebrews used to speak of nations like rivers, and these were the nations that had in earlier times overflowed their banks, so to speak.

Isaiah was used by God to prophesy the coming up of the Assyrians with their massive, almost uncountable, armies campaigning through Palestine and destroying every leaf in their way. The great prophet talked of it as the river overflowing its banks and flooding the whole land of Judaea, and prophesied that one day there would come a time when the armies of Assyria should so flood the land of Judaea that it would rise even to the neck of little Jerusalem city as she stood there on her elevated mountain. From the vision now given to Daniel, he is warned that on another occasion the armies of the Seleucid emperor would come overflowing through their land, leaving terrible destruction in their way.

As a young man, Daniel had seen the unthinkable happen: the armies of imperial Babylon had come into the land. They had done what Assyria had never been able to do: they had taken Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and the city and took away the cream of the people, Daniel included. As a youth he eventually found himself in Babylon, and now as an elderly man he was standing by the banks of the Hiddekel.

In the year 1958 I remember standing for the first time on the banks of the river Rhine in Germany. I have to confess the kind of feelings and memories that ran through my mind that day. So this was the Rhine, was it? This was the great Germany that had sent its V2 bombers with their doodlebugs past my bedroom window and scared the life out of us and devastated our cities. Now I was standing by their big and noble and kingly river.

I imagine Daniel might have been feeling a little like that—allow my imagination, won't you? You theologians can wake up after I've done! I suspect he did what we've been doing this evening. Now an elderly man, he stood by that river thinking how much water had flowed under the bridges since he'd first come to that part of the world. What memories he had of Jerusalem, besieged and taken when he was a boy. Perhaps he could still remember the sound of Jeremiah and his stirring prophecies, which had come true.

What stories he could tell. Taken as prisoners down to Babylon, what a marvellous experience he and his young colleagues had, as they entered the university and took their first stand for God. Remaining faithful to the Lord, they'd refused the king's food. When three of his colleagues defied the Emperor of Babylon himself and refused to bow down to his golden image they were thrown into the furnace for their trouble. The Lord's presence was with them in the flames and they'd come out. In his middle years Daniel had risen to eminence in the civil service of Babylon, and then later on he had become head of the imperial civil service of Medo-Persia. Ah, what days he could remember.

Reflecting on the future

Now an elderly man, and in the course of nature not much time left to him, as he stood watching the waters of the river go by until they disappeared over the horizon, I can't help imagining what thoughts would have been in his mind. 'Where do the waters go? What lies over the horizon?' Not merely for himself, but for his nation.

He had memories that were full of glorious hope. He had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image and the great stone cut out without hands that would one day fall upon the image and smash it to smithereens (Dan 2:45). In other words, the Messiah would come and the Gentile imperial empires would fall before him and be removed. The Messiah himself should fill the earth with his glorious kingdom.

Then that stirring vision given to himself of the four beasts in their wild array, one after the other fuming and tearing and destroying and stamping the earth until the supreme beast of beasts arose, the fourth great beast (ch. 7). God intervened in his divine wisdom, and the Ancient of Days, whose clothing was white as snow, and hair like pure wool, took his throne. He had the rationality to deal with the beasts, those irrational forces, and the books were opened. Then there came one like the son of man, and dominion was given to him (7:9-14).

In those early and middle years, what wonderful hopes had been given to him of the coming Messiah. He did his best for the health of his fellow citizens and the amelioration of their lot, but he had a bigger hope than all the civil service combined. Not by all their pushing of pens or computers would the millennium come; only by the coming of the Messiah. But more recently the dark shadow of pain had crossed his life. He had diligently counted the years, and according to Jeremiah's prophecy the exile would be over after seventy years. Hadn't Jeremiah said it in the name of the Lord, that Jerusalem and the land would be restored and the temple rebuilt? (Jer 25:11; 29:10.)

He'd searched the books and found the time was nearly come. He took it to God in prayer, asking about the restoration of Jerusalem, and was given that devastating answer. Yes, God would keep his word; Jerusalem would be restored at the end of the seventy years. But not fully, for Israel continued still in their blindness and disobedience. Jerusalem would be restored, but things would go from bad to worse. In the end, when Messiah came to them, they would be so blind to their sins that the Messiah himself should be 'cut off' (Dan 9:26). After that, there would be wars and desolation until the end. Standing now on the brink of the river, perhaps also on the brink of the grave, maybe it wasn't his own personal pain that

was troubling him, but what should happen to his beloved people. Where were the waters going? What lay over the horizon for them?

What lies over the horizon for us?

We cannot claim to be Daniels, but we have human hearts like he had, and I'm sure nobody's going to blame us if we indulge in a little looking back and then a looking forward. Ah, my brothers and sisters, as you stand on the brink of your river I see your faces brighten. What triumphs of God you can remember, can't you? Those early days in your teens and your youth and your twenties, when first you were called upon to stand for God and you dared to take courage in your hand at school, in the factory, in the shop, in the university. Some of you risked the sacrifice of everything for it and paid the price, and God has honoured you. What triumphs you've seen since; you and your colleagues in your Sunday school, in your preaching, in your eldership work and in your families, maybe, and there's a sense in which you'd love to live those years again. But the water has gone, passing under the bridges, and it will not come again.

We stand tonight looking forward, asking ourselves where the waters go and what lies over the horizon. We feel a shadow falling over us. In three weeks' time the whole Middle East could go up in flames; or it mightn't, who knows? In this last fourteen months the face of the world has been changed, and now all unexpected this crisis blows up. A million men confronting each other in the Gulf, and if Saddam Hussein should choose to land a rocket on Tel Aviv, if he could do such a thing, what will happen then? And if he does, who can tell the implications? It would scarce leave any of us untouched, even if it's only in our pockets, through the soaring prices of oil and a difficult economy. What shall we say about people who may lose loved ones?

What lay over the horizon for the nation that Daniel loved so much?

When it was told him it was almost more than the venerable Daniel could bear to hear. It's a good thing that God doesn't give us all to be prophets and to see the future.

God holds the key of all the unknown,
and I am glad;
If other hands should hold the key,
or if he trusted it to me,
I might be sad.¹

But God was pleased to reveal to Daniel, and therefore through him to us, what was going to happen to his beloved people, Israel. Briefly put, it was this. After the Persian Empire there should arise the Hellenistic Empire set about by Alexander the Great, after whose death it would divide into four parts. Two parts of that empire would become exceedingly strong; we call the part in the north the Seleucid Empire, and the part in the south the Ptolemaic Empire. Over the period of some centuries these two giants would be everlastingly at each other's

¹ John Parker (no biographical information available).

throats, trying to extend their empire and grab land one from the other. It's a game they still follow in that part of the world. Lying between those two gigantic empires, little Israel would be controlled now by the one and then subsequently by the other.

As those two empires would war against each other to gain control of more territory, their great armies would come like veritable rivers in flood, particularly through the coastal areas of Israel. Passing through, gaining their victories or defeats or whatever, and then eventually subsiding back to their countries. When they'd gone, what devastation they would leave behind them.

It's a thing to remember, isn't it? When those armies set out, how romantic they looked. The generals in their armour, the colours, the medals; the tremendous latest inventions of siege weapons; the mass troops. Every young corporal turning the hearts and eyes of all the little girls and young ladies around them. What dashing fellows they were. And as the great battalions marched through these countries, how impressive was the tramp on the ground of thousands of feet in unison. That's when they came; think of what it was like when they'd gone. The trees were broken, the land ruined, the houses burned. Broken bodies, crazed minds, and all for what? Who cares now who won the battle between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids? What was all the slaughter for?

How many times it's been repeated down the ages. Who cares now what Napoleon won or didn't win? Think of the thousands of lives that were destroyed through him. When I was in Moscow I saw the great skyscraper-height portraits of Lenin lying on the ground. Stalin is reported to have said that you can't make an omelette unless you smash a lot of eggs. Well, he smashed a lot of eggs; he and Lenin smashed millions of them. And now, not only have the walls fallen down, thank God, but the communist theory too. People say, 'Why do rational men behave like it?'

The effect on Israel

So now let us focus our attention on its effect on Israel. The prophet is told that as these armies come in four distinct periods, marching through the land, it would be perceived as a threat to Jerusalem city. So much so, that as the armies came through and threatened the city and the great sanctuary of God, many would think it was the beginning of the end time. It wouldn't be; the floods would subside and Jerusalem would survive.

The importance and significance of Jerusalem

Daniel was told, and the other prophets add their quota to the story, that one day there would come a great Gentile power. And not just one, but all the nations of the earth, said God, would come against Jerusalem city. Why? Daniel is given to see behind the scenes, and it helps to give the answer to that question.

'In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel' (10:1). The veil was gently pulled aside a little and he was given to understand the battles in the heavenlies, as the rulers of darkness strive against the angelic powers that are loyal to God. The centre of the great field of their campaign is the city of Jerusalem. Why so? Because it is the city where almighty God in time past was pleased to put his name (see 2 Chr 6:6). It was the capital city

of that nation whom God chose; whose King David was chosen not only for his own time, but to be the ancestor and prototype of the Messiah himself. That city holds a fascination for the great powers of darkness in their determination to blot it from the face of the earth.

Here comes an exceedingly dark thing. Daniel was told that one day there would arise a wilful king (ch. 11). Not content to ban religion, he would put himself in the very place of God and set up in the temple of God 'the abomination that makes desolate' (v. 31). Satan's counterfeit beast imitating God; for this is the battle of the ages and at its heart lies the struggle between almighty God and his inveterate rebel foe, his satanic majesty. The battle for the hearts of men and for the dominion of planet earth.

When eventually the Messiah came, such was the hold of the power of darkness upon the minds of people that Israel, not all of them but officially as a nation, rejected their Messiah, and the Son of David was cast out of his own capital city.

My friend, don't think that was the end of it. I tell you straight; when Christ rose from the dead and went back to glory he didn't slink out of this world, but in resurrection life he came to Jerusalem city. He took his departure to heaven from the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem and commanded his apostles that they were to preach the gospel worldwide, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). It matters where the gospel started from. Our Christian gospel is based on that great movement that God began centuries before the Lord Jesus came. Amongst those purposes was the establishment of David's city, the city of Jerusalem. And forever and forever, to the remotest times of eternity, salvation and the gospel will be concerned with and based on the events that took place just outside Jerusalem (John 19:20). Hence the venom of the enemy.

A time of unparalleled trouble

So Daniel was told what must happen. Israel in their disobedience and straying must eventually be chastised, and what was told to Daniel was reiterated by our Lord Jesus. There would come a time of trouble for Israel, 'such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now' (see Matt 24:21). How would you have felt if you had been Daniel? Would you have felt merely like having a very pleasant theological discussion at a Bible reading about the exact date of it? 'O, my people!' said Daniel. 'Is it true that there must be a time of unparalleled trouble for my people?' When the Lord Jesus thought of it as he looked over the city, did it not break his very heart? 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I . . . and you would not' (Matt 23:37).

The man above the river

It would have been an insufferable load for one little human heart to carry, were it not for the wonderful thing that happened that day by the waters of the river Hiddekel. As Daniel watched the waters flow by and remembered the past, he thought of what must lie over the horizon where the waters were going. As he looked, there stood a man *above* the water—not in the water being carried with the tide, nor on the bank watching the river, but over the water (12:6–7). His appearance was glorious and his knowledge wonderful, for as he starts to talk to

Daniel you perceive that he could see beyond the horizon; not only the geographical horizon but beyond the horizons of time.

As he talks to Daniel, he begins to talk about the great time of trouble that shall come. As we now know, it was distant to Daniel by thousands of years. He talked even beyond that to the time of the resurrection, 'when many that sleep in the dust shall arise' (see 12:2 own trans.). And he even pierced the great eternity and told Daniel that when it was all over his *lot* forever stood secure (v. 13 KJV).

It must have been of immense comfort to Daniel's heart in the first place, to see this figure standing above the river. Like in another sense it was to the twelve apostles as they toiled one dark stormy night, and amidst the wind and the waves they saw a man walking above the waters. He stepped into their boat, demonstrating his control of those waters.

So it was for Daniel; and shall I not add, so it is for us? We don't have the burdens that a great prophet like Daniel had to bear, but we have them too, don't we? Sometimes things happen; shocking things. My heart went out to the mother reported on the news the other day. She was out for a walk by a canal with three children and two fell in and were drowned. As she tried to save them, the baby fell in as well and drowned. What things could happen tomorrow? This is no fairy story, but what happened to Daniel and what happened to the twelve in the boat, surely happens to us at times? Through the mist of tears, the flurry of the storm and the rage of the torrent, we see no flash of lightening, no wonderful vision, but we sense the approach of the Saviour. When we bid him into our boat there ensues the calm of knowing that even sorrow and the ways of men and the politics of earth and the seeming accidents of life stand under his gracious control.

Who was this man?

The description here of this angel is given elsewhere of our Lord, so it makes me think they're the same (see Rev 1:12-16).

'No,' say the theologians, 'because this great figure above the river had to confess that when he was fighting the Prince of Persia nobody was there to help him except Michael. 'Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia' (10:13). 'That cannot be the Lord Jesus,' they say, 'because he doesn't need anyone's help in fighting anything.'

Doesn't he? We'd better listen to Deborah celebrating Barak's victory, and she commends all those who took part and helped in that. Then she utters a dire curse: 'Curse Meroz . . . because *they did not come to the help of the LORD*' (Judg 5:23). My brothers, my sisters, he needs your help. I can't explain to you how it is, but such was his condescension that when he prayed in Gethsemane an angel came and ministered to him. Risen now in glory, he calls upon us as soldiers in the fight to stand with him. We too wrestle, not with carnal weapons but with spiritual weapons. We fight the great fight of the ages as we wrestle against principalities, powers, rulers and dominions in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12). We may fight on a different battlefield to Daniel, but the war is the same.

What he told Daniel

Their names are written in the book

Let us hear, then, the comfort that this glorious figure gave to Daniel on that marvellous occasion. First of all, he said, 'Daniel, there's coming a time of tribulation, or trouble, such as never has been before. But, on the other hand, at that time your people shall be delivered—all that are written in the book.'

A bit of a scare-story has gone round about the tribulation, but in every place where it's mentioned, from one end of Scripture to the other, it is accompanied more times than not by an assurance that God's loyal people of that day shall be delivered. God is not going to be defeated by his foes. 'There shall be a time of trouble,' says the Lord to Daniel, 'but at that time *your people shall be delivered*, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book' (12:1).

They say we fight on a different battlefield; but may we not take that promise and apply it to ourselves? What lies in the future, my brother? What lies ahead for you, my sister? I can tell you on unimpeachable authority that in this world you will have tribulation. So do you just fold your hands and die? No, no. 'But take heart; I have overcome the world', says the Lord Jesus (John 16:33). We must be realists. 'God has not promised skies always blue,'² but our blessed conquering Lord has given his assurance that he has overcome the world. In him, we shall overcome—everyone that's written in the book (see Rev 3:5).

Don't vex me now with deep theological questions at this time of night! But I can hear someone say, 'If Daniel's people were allowed to think that they were written in the book, surely I may be allowed to do so, and you too.' Let us get life's proportions right. The Gospels tell us that after one successful gospel campaign the apostles came back to the Lord Jesus full of excitement. Who wouldn't, if they'd led many to faith in the Lord Jesus? So they said, 'Lord, you know, even the demons are subject to us in your name' (see Luke 10:17). That was something for Peter. He was used to a few fish being subject to him in the nets; but demons were a new level for him.

'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' said Peter.

'But that's not the thing to rejoice in,' said Christ. 'Not really, Peter.'

'There's something bigger than victory over demons?'

'Indeed! Rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (see v. 20).

Oh my brothers, my sisters, as you stand by the river asking yourselves what's over the edge, I give you full leave to *rejoice*, even to smile. I mustn't say 'laugh' at this juncture, but do let your hearts be merry inside. Rejoice in this: your names are written in heaven. To borrow another metaphor, they shall never be erased from the palms of our blessed Lord on which they are engraved in indelible grace (see Isa 49:16).

My name from the palms of His hands

eternity will not erase;

² Annie Johnson Flint (1866-1932), 'What God hath Promised.'

Impressed on His heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.³

The time of tribulation would be cut short

Then somebody by the river asked a question. It's a natural question, isn't it? 'How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?' (12:6). In other words, how long shall the tribulation period be for Israel as a nation? Daniel then records what he heard and saw. When the man above the river was confronted with that question, 'How long shall this terrible period last?', he raised both hands to heaven and did what is the most sacred thing, perhaps, anyone could do. He swore an oath by God Almighty that the time of trouble should be curtailed to three-and-a-half years at most (v. 7).

When at last incarnate, our Lord came and talked to his disciples of what should happen to Jerusalem city and the nation of Israel. He told them that the tribulation would be so severe that except those days had been cut short, no human being would be saved (see Matt 24:22). But hear the divine compassion: the days *have been* shortened and his elect people shall come through. Some maybe to a martyr's crown, but that's another story. To die as a martyr for the Lord is to be victorious and a conqueror at the end.

They say we fight on a different battlefield, but the assurance is given to us too, isn't it? 'No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. *God is faithful*, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability' (1 Cor 10:13). It's not always the sharp, fierce temptation that bears us down most. What about the long years of trial and pain that seemingly promise no end through life? Our blessed Lord does not play with the feelings of his people. He still lifts both hands to heaven and says 'God is faithful'. He will not let you be tempted above what you are able to bear, but will with the temptation, make a way of escape so that you bear it.

His oath, His covenant, His blood
support me in the 'whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.⁴

Jerusalem shall be broken in pieces

'It shall come to its end,' said the man to Daniel, 'when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the holy people' (12:7 own trans.).

'Surely that's hard work—shall they do it?' says someone.

Yes, indeed they will. According to Zechariah, part of Jerusalem city shall fall to the great hosts of the nations as they gather against Jerusalem, and they shall break in pieces the power of the holy kingdom (see Zech 14:2).

³ Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), 'A Debtor to Mercy Alone' (1771).

⁴ Edward Mote (1797-1874), 'My Hope is Built on Nothing Less' (1834).

God's purpose is to purify his people

'Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined' (v. 10). If there were another way God would use it. But if this is the only way, then God in his love will allow that nation to be broken, so that in their brokenness they may find their coming Messiah.

As humans, and if we are believers, we find an echo in our hearts, do we not? There are times when God must allow circumstances that would appear to us to break us, but not to destroy us. They too are designed to purify our faith and bring us through as pure gold (see 1 Pet 1:7). The moment the Lord has reached the desired end, the pressure will be removed because the 'product' is finished. God is no sentimentalist. He is love, but God is tough. He has designed us and his purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son. Be it furnace or flood, he will bring us through until that end is achieved.

You shall stand in your lot

'Now go your way, Daniel,' he says. 'Beyond all the turmoil—the coming and going of armies and the history of the centuries—when it's all over there's a place, an inheritance, in heaven reserved for you. In that coming glorious future, Daniel, you shall stand in your *lot*' (see 12:9–13). After that, Daniel went home—back to his office maybe, and eventually to glory.

There are many things that we do not know, but of this we may be sure. There is an inheritance, a 'lot', 'that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading' (1 Pet 1:4). And a part of that great inheritance has your name on it, my brother, my sister. Redeemed by the blood of Christ, you will stand in your lot in the day to come.

Do you sometimes allow yourselves to think about it? You do well, because it's real. And when at last you see me there, you'll have to look twice for I shall be very different. When I've explored my lot, I hope you'll give me permission now and again to spend a Tuesday afternoon on yours, to see the wonderful things that God has achieved through his redemption and his discipline of you in these difficult years of life. With all the saints of God you will be there to enjoy it to your eternal satisfaction and for his glory.

May the Lord use his word to encourage our hearts, for his name's sake.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.