

# Jacob's Trouble, the Sealed Book, and the Numbered Days

*Daniel Chapter 12 · August 1, 2013*

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## Thy People — Not Mine

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Chapter 12 opens with the words, At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people. The word thy is significant — not my people, but thy people: Daniel's people. This is a precise description of Israel's standing before God at this time. They are His people in origin and in covenant promise, but at this point in the narrative they are declared not His people — Lo-ammi. The estrangement is real, though not final.

That condition began at the Babylonian captivity, when the Shekinah glory departed and Israel ceased to be the channel through which God ruled the earth. It continues through the whole of the times of the Gentiles. God has not forgotten His people, but He is not presently declaring them His in the way He once did and will again. The tribulation is not a punishment imposed on strangers; it is the disciplinary work of a father upon his own children — painful precisely because the relationship is real, and aimed at restoration.

The time of distress such as never was since there was a nation until that time is a phrase the Lord quoted directly from Daniel in Matthew 24. Jeremiah calls it the time of Jacob's trouble. Jacob — the name of the natural, wrestling man — is used because this is the purifying fire that will bring out Israel on the other side bearing the name of the prince of God. It is not for believers. We will be home with the Lord before it begins.

## Whose Tribulation Is It?

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Popular notions about the tribulation abound, and many of them place believers at the centre of it — as though the great distress described here is something Christians must endure before the Lord can establish His kingdom. But the entire structure of Daniel argues otherwise. Everything in these chapters is centred on Israel and on Jerusalem. The king of the north and the king of the south do not trample through Europe or North America on their way to fight each other; they trample through Israel. The land of beauty, the mountain of holy beauty, the sanctuary — all of these are in Israel. God's purposes on earth are centred in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 30:7 settles the question by its title: Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it — it is even the time of Jacob's trouble. Not the church's trouble, not the world's trouble in some general sense, but Jacob's. And what was Jacob being troubled toward? The name Israel. The time of distress is the final process by which God brings His earthly people to the point where they can receive their Messiah, acknowledge their sin in rejecting Him, and enter the kingdom.

And this process is not in any way a general spiritual principle about believers going through hard times before blessing. It is a specific, historical, future event, tied to the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish people, the 70th week of Daniel, and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory. The honest reading of Daniel leaves no room for the tribulation to be about the church.

## **The Book of Life and the Regathering of Israel**

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At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that is found written in the book. Revelation 13:8 speaks of those whose names had not been written from the founding of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb. The book is the same. God has a record — not a physical volume in some heavenly library, but a record that is precise and complete — of those who are His. In the tribulation,

that record will determine who is delivered and who is not.

Verse 2 uses the image of awakening from the dust of the earth. This is not, in the primary sense, a reference to bodily resurrection, though resurrection language is used. It is an image of the regathering of Israel — scattered across the nations as though asleep, dormant, as far from the land as dust from a tree — being gathered back. And in that gathering, the judgment is manifest: some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. The gathering does not guarantee the blessing. The blessing belongs to those whose names are written.

## **The Wise Who Shine**

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Among the gathered people there will be two classes: the wise and the many. The many is Israel looked at as a whole — the full mixed multitude, elect and non-elect together, not yet separated. The wise are those to whom the Spirit of God has given understanding — not academic or intellectual knowledge, but the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. They will instruct the many. They will turn them toward righteousness — not by converting them through their own persuasiveness, but by bringing the truth of God before them so that the hearts of the elect are manifested.

The image given for the wise is stars. Stars do not run to and fro in order to shine. They simply shine, because that is their nature. The contrast in verse 4 with the many who run to and fro is deliberate: knowledge increases for those who are always on the move, gathering information, chasing the next thing — but wisdom belongs to those who are still, who fear God, who give light because the Spirit of God is in them. It is a special honour to shine in the time of deepest darkness. Just before the Lord comes to establish His kingdom, the darkness of that tribulation period will be at its worst. Those who shine in it will shine the more.

Stars shine when all else is dark. Before the sun rises and turns everything to brightness, the stars have their moment. So too these wise ones of Israel in the

tribulation: they shine in the night, and when the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in His wings, the night will be over and their work will be complete. They shall shine as the brightness of the expanse and as the stars, forever and ever.

## Seal the Book — and the Contrast with Revelation

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In verse 4 Daniel is told to close the words and seal the book until the time of the end. There is a reason the words are sealed. The things revealed to Daniel are not for immediate fulfilment. Two more great empires must arise and fall. The Messiah must come, be rejected, and be cut off. An indefinite gap must pass — which we now know to be more than two thousand years — before the 70th week begins. There is no urgency to have the book open. It is sealed because the time is long.

The contrast with Revelation 22:10 is striking and intentional. John, at the end of his vision, is told the exact opposite: seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. What Daniel was told to seal, John is told not to seal. What was distant for Daniel is imminent for John — and for us. We are not in Daniel's position, looking at centuries of history still to unfold before the end. We are in John's position: the Lord may come at any moment. The word to us is not seal the book — it is Yea, I come quickly. Amen, come Lord Jesus.

*And thou, Daniel, close the words and seal the book till the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. —  
Daniel 12:4*

John wrote, little children, it is the last hour. Paul wrote, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. These are not the words of men looking at a long stretch of history still to come. They are the words of those who know that what Daniel saw in the distance is now at the door. The rapture is imminent. The day of the Lord is at hand. The gospel of grace will close when the Lord comes. That

urgency should mark everything we do.

## **The Time, Times, and Half a Time — and the Scattering of the Holy People**

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In verses 5 through 7, Daniel sees two more angelic figures on the banks of the river, and one of them asks the figure above the waters: How long to the end of these wonders? The answer is solemn. The man above the waters — with both hands raised to heaven, swearing by Him that liveth forever — says it is for a time, times, and a half. Three and a half years. And when the scattering of the power of the holy people shall be accomplished, all these things shall be finished.

The scattering of the power of the holy people refers to the period during which the remnant of Israel is hunted, dispersed, and apparently broken. This is the great tribulation — the last three and a half years of Daniel's 70th week, the time that the Lord said would be cut short for the sake of the elect, else no flesh would be saved. When that scattering is finally ended — when the last act of the beast against God's people has been permitted — the judgment of the Gentile powers begins, and all these things shall be finished.

Daniel did not understand this. He asked again, My Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he was told, simply, go thy way. These things were not for him to understand in full. The time of the end was far off. He had his own way to walk, his own service to finish. And we can take something from this for ourselves: we do not need to have every prophetic detail in order to walk faithfully. Daniel walked faithfully for decades without understanding the full meaning of what he had been shown. He went his way, served where he was placed, and trusted God with what he could not yet see.

## **The Numbered Days — 1260, 1290, and 1335**

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The closing verses of Daniel give us three numbers that have occupied students of prophecy for centuries. From the time the continual sacrifice is taken away and the abomination that maketh desolate is set up — the midpoint of the 70th week — there shall be 1,290 days. And blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the 1,335 days.

The 1,260 days, or time, times, and half a time — three and a half years of 30-day months — marks the duration of the great tribulation, the period during which the beast has power and the holy people are scattered. The 1,290 days extends 30 days beyond that. The 1,335 days extends 75 days beyond the 1,260. Scripture does not specify precisely what takes place on each of these days, but the overall shape is clear: after the tribulation ends, there is a period during which the Lord deals with the Gentile powers in judgment, gathers His earthly people, and establishes His kingdom. The 1,335th day appears to correspond to the full establishment of that kingdom — the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrating the end of the journey and the beginning of settled rest under Messiah.

The three great feasts yet to be fulfilled for Israel — the blowing of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles — find their antitype in these days. The first four feasts were literally fulfilled at the Lord's first coming: Passover in His death, Unleavened Bread in His burial, Firstfruits in His resurrection, Pentecost in the giving of the Spirit. There is no reason the last three should not be equally literal in their fulfilment. And Daniel's numbers give us, in outline, the days within which those final feasts will be fulfilled for a restored and redeemed Israel.

## **Daniel's Lot — and the Hope Before Him**

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The final word to Daniel is tender and personal: But do thou go thy way until the end, and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. He will rest — the body of this aged servant of God will be laid down, and he will wait. But at

the end of the days he will stand in his lot. He will have his place. He will be there.

Daniel served under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus — four of the greatest earthly rulers the world has seen, men who exercised dominion over the whole known earth. He watched them up close: their pride, their folly, their impiety, their occasional flashes of something better. He knew what government in the hands of men looked like. And there is a thought worth keeping: when the Lord Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom, Daniel will be there to see it. No one will know the difference better than he does. No one will be more capable of appreciating the contrast between what Nebuchadnezzar's throne was and what Christ's throne is. He will stand in his lot at the end of the days — and what a lot it will be.

*But do thou go thy way until the end, and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. — Daniel 12:13*

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