22/6/2008 Rev Robert Denham

It is important to know where we are headed.
When I was much younger, my sister had a red VW. 1 day we went looking for the zig zag railway. We found what we thought was it, and decided to drive down a dirt road. It led into a tunnel, so she gamely drove in, not knowing what would meet us, nor where we would end up.
I am not fond of dark tunnels. It was narrow... a bit wider than the car. But the light at the end of the tunnel kept us going. However the light grew too slowly, and did not loom large and bright. It ended up being only small enough to look out of... Not big enough to walk through, and certainly too small to drive through. And the car had no reversing lights!
I had to get out, get the torch and direct as she slowly backed all the way back along this disused tunnel.
It is important to know where we are headed.
Do you know what your future will hold? Many people try to find out what their future holds, e.g. at psychic fairs, Tarot cards, astrology etc. But the Bible says that road leads into a tunnel with no light at the end. Get out, get the torch and go back!
Do you know what your future will hold? Since the time of Jesus, Christians have believed the teaching of Jesus and his apostles that death is not the end. After we die, we will live again. Because Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. That is affirmed in the Apostle's creed we said today "I believe in… the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."
Today we are looking at the astonishing passage of Daniel 12. It is astonishing, because many people do not realise that Jesus was not the 1st to teach the resurrection from the dead. He did not go into a blind tunnel that ended with his death, and then, as it were, get out of the car, get the torch, and go back! The resurrection is not simply a wish for people who have not really had a good life here and want a better one in heaven.
We know Jesus taught a lot about heaven, and the resurrection, in parables, sayings and even when his friend Lazarus died he said he was the resurrection and the life. Then he raised Lazarus from the dead to show his promises were not empty.
Yet Daniel 12 is astonishing as it is one of the passages in the Old Testament which also teach about heaven, hell and the resurrection from the dead.
There it is... raw, unpackaged... not finely prepared... still in bulk, but it is there nonetheless. Stay in the car, keep driving, the tunnel goes through!

(v1-3) *There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. 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 for ever and ever.*
The last few chapters of the book of Daniel have been teaching us that along the tunnel of our history there will be wars and turmoil. And the end will be even worse. But if your name is in the book, you will be delivered.
There is a resurrection to life. However, if your name is not there, Daniel 12 also says that there is a resurrection to shame.
Multitudes who are raised for life, will shine. No more dark tunnels.
But there will be no glory for the multitudes who will be raised for everlasting contempt and shame. They will not stay dead, they rise, but will not shine. No torch, no getting out of the car, no going back.
What makes the difference in the 2 groups? Daniel 12 says one lot has their names written in the book, the other does not. 2 other clues are given. Those who shine are wise, and/or have led many to righteousness.
It certainly does not have the greater detail that Jesus gave us, but if we see Daniel 12 as being further up the tunnel, he is looking down and seeing a lot of dark to come, yet way down there, there is light. He may have had more details passed to him, but he was told in v4 *but you Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.*
By the time of Jesus, we were much closer to the end and the descriptions Jesus gives shows much more clarity, reassuring us that unlike my sister's driving choices, this tunnel will go through. The end is coming and we will pass through.
How long to the end of the tunnel? Daniel was told in v7 *It will be for a time, times and half a time*. Then in v11, he's told that the total time is 1,335 days, which is 3½yrs. The time, times and ½ a time may be 3½ times. That is how long Antiochus IV Epiphanes stayed in Jerusalem. But what does that mean? After almost 3000 yrs, we know it did not mean 42 literal months. If it is anything like the very comic-like writing of a style of writing called apocalyptic, of which Revelation is a good example,

3½ times or years is half the perfect time, which is 7 times or years.
That means that it will stop. It is not an eternal arrangement. But how long?
Daniel was told to be content with not knowing. As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.
Jesus also told us to keep on going without knowing when the end will come.
While we are in the tunnel, it can be okay, enjoying the journey. But along the way we will be tempted to turn back, or to think that there is nothing else but the tunnel.
But Daniel and other Old Testament prophets, and especially Jesus and his apostles have called on us to trust Jesus and keep going in faith, even if the light at the end seems so tiny as if not to be there, and all were like the valley of the shadow of death.
The light is there. We know because Jesus promised to be raised on the 3rd day, and he was. And he promises to raise us. So keep going. No torch, no getting out of the car, no going back, and if you are not in the tunnel that leads to the light of Jesus, get in and let us go to His light.