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**The Day of the Lord:
The Time of Jacob's Trouble and the Renewal of Zion**

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Abstract

The Day of the Lord is a prominent and recurring theme for the OT prophets. It is a day paradoxically characterized by both unprecedented wrath and divine blessing. The prophets describe it as a day of dreadful darkness and foreboding storms (Joel 2:1-2), when the sun will be darkened and the moon will not light (Isa 13:4-13), or simply as a day that will bring darkness not light (Amos 5:18-20). However, it is elsewhere depicted as a day where in the evening there will be light (Zech 14:6-9) and when the light of the full moon will be like the sun's glare (Isa 30:26). As it regards Israel, the dreadful Day of the Lord will be a time of Jacob's trouble, when the Lord will deal a blow to His people (Jer 30:1-7, 12-15), and yet it is harkened as a day when the Lord will deliver Israel (Jer 30:8-11, 16-17) and when Zion will flourish (Isa 30:19-26). In this paper I argue that the Day of the Lord is best understood with respect to the day God defined six times in the first chapter of the Genesis account (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31): the evening and the morning are a day. This definition of a day, defined first by evening and afterward by morning, forecasts the eschatological significance of the Day of the Lord which will be characterized first by impenetrable darkness and afterwards by irrepressible light. Another way of understanding this is that the Day of the Lord's wrath and the Day of the Lord's deliverance are two distinguishable parts of one prophetic event whose eschatological fulfillment will be realized in the tribulation and the millennium.

Introduction

Biblical scholars have enjoyed engaging in much haranguing over the Hebrew word יוֹם (yôm or day). It is a simple word, really, without a lot of nuance. It's Greek counterpart, used consistently in the LXX is ἡμέρα (hēmera), and is no less straightforward. The range of meanings for the word "day" are limited to whether it is used of: 1) the period of time spanning from one sunrise or sunset to the next, or what is commonly referred to today as a 24-hour period

as defined by a full 360° rotation of the earth as it orbits the sun; or 2) the warm or light duration defined by sunrise to sunset, or that derivative span of the earth's rotation during which the earth's surface is facing the sun—when used in this way, the term appears as a correlative to night; or 3) a general and non-specified temporal reference defined by its adjectival or in Greek, its genitival modifier, that is often explicit or other times implied.¹ In this paper, all three uses will be employed. Nevertheless, their meanings will be discernable without additional comment or disambiguation, simply on account of the surrounding context in which the word appears.

Concerning the first usage, where a day refers to a 24-hour span of time, there has been some debate as to whether this duration should be understood as beginning at sunrise or the morning, or whether it is better conceived as beginning at sunset or the evening.² It should be noted that the days that appear in the creation week, as found in Genesis, are defined by “evening and morning,” and not *vice versa*. Nevertheless, some scholars have debated whether the preferred reading of the phrase “evening and morning” would be “And it was sunset, then it was sunrise, day *X*.”³ However, the clear indication from the creation account is that darkness preceded light (vv. 2-3). This point is reinforced by the fact that there was no sun until the fourth day, and so to define the first three days of creation in this way would unduly strain the text. For this reason, the majority of scholars have traditionally understood the Hebrew day to consist of evening first, followed by morning. That the people of Israel understood it this way is plainly evidenced by the fact that they observed their Sabbath from sundown to sundown (Lev 23:32), or

¹ This usage has grown increasingly popular with biblical scholars in recent years, especially as it has to do with the many occurrences of “day” in the Genesis creation account, despite the absence of any explicit or implied adjectival modifier.

² Cf. H. R. Stroes, “Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning? Some Biblical Observations” in *Vetus Testamentum*, Oct. 1966, Vol 16, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 1966), pp. 460-475; and J. Amanda McGuire, “Evening or Morning: When Does the Biblical Day Begin?” in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 201-214.

³ McGuire, 202.

what we would refer to today as Friday evening to Saturday evening. That a Hebrew “day” should be understood in this way, with two corresponding spans beginning with darkness and then followed by light, will be seen to bear significance on how the term is used in the prophetic expression “Day of the Lord.”

The Day of the Lord in Prophecy

The term “Day of the Lord,” and other similar phrases, such as “that Day,” “the Day of Christ,” or even sometimes simply expressed with the article “the Day,” where the adjectival phrase is implied rather than stated, appear throughout Scripture. This expression is consistently employed by the OT prophets as well as by the writers of the NT to refer to a non-specified period wherein God sovereignly exercises His prerogative to intervene in human affairs to accomplish His ends.⁴ While the prophetic expression is not always forward looking, it does always have in view God’s accomplishment of His providential dealings with mankind, in judgment. Concerning the use of this term for past events, Renald Showers has noted:

The Bible indicates that there have been several Days of the Lord in the past in which God demonstrated His sovereign rule by raising up several nations to execute His judgment on other nations. He raised up Assyria to judge the northern kingdom of Israel during the 700s B.C. (Amos 5:18, 20), Babylon to judge the southern kingdom of Judah during the 600s and 500s B.C. (Lam. 1:12; 2:1, 21-22; Ezel. 7:19; 13:5; Zeph. 2:2-3), Babylon to judge Egypt and its allies during the 500s B.C. (Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3), and Medo-Persia to judge Babylon during the 500s B.C. (Isa. 13:6, 9).⁵

However, the most consistent use of the prophetic phrase is in reference to the future occasion whereby God will execute His judgment in relation to Israel and all the Gentile nations of the earth. The prophet Jeremiah describes it as a time in which God will judge Israel saying:

⁴ For a more thorough discussion on the “Day of the Lord in Prophecy” see Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995), 30-73

⁵ Showers, 31.

“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:7). Yet, elsewhere, the prophet Obadiah designates it as follows: “the Day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head” (Oba 15). The prophet Isaiah also confirms: “Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world and all things that come forth from it. For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies” (Isa 34:1-2; cf. Joel 3:1-6; Zech 14:1-3, 12-15). Renald Showers has noted that in this regard, the Day of the Lord bears a characteristic that cannot be said to have been fulfilled historically, as “up to this point in history, there has not been a judgment of all nations during the same time period. In view of this, we can conclude that the Day of the Lord of Isaiah 34 and Obadiah must be future.”⁶

Additionally, the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians speaks of the Day of the Lord as a future event, saying: “you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thess 5:2-4). Moreover, in Paul’s second epistle to the same church, he corrects the false claim that the Day of the Lord had already come, saying “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thess 2:3-4). Therefore, it can be concluded from the many references to the Day of the Lord in the OT and NT that the prophetic phrase refers to a future day of judgment that corresponds to the Lord’s

⁶ Showers, 32.

visitation to the earth that concerns all the inhabitants of the earth, including both Israel and the Gentile nations, alike.

However, there are an equivalent number of prophetic passages that describe the Day of the Lord as not merely a day of destruction (Isa 2:10-21; 13:6-13; 1 Thess 5:3), but of renewal (Jer 30:7-11). The Prophet Isaiah speaks to this character of the Day of the Lord when he declares that favorable conditions will be experienced by the remnant of Israel who are delivered through the great and terrible Day of the Lord: “the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” (Isa 4:2-3). It must therefore be concluded that when all the prophetic references are taken together, there is a two-fold nature to the Day of the Lord, namely the Day of the Lord exhibits two very different characteristics: desolation and restoration.

Evening – the Time of Jacob’s Trouble

The first clearly discernable aspect of the Day of the Lord is that it bears a dreadful character that the prophets often compare to impenetrable darkness. This characteristic of darkness as expressed by the prophets Isaiah, Joel, Amos, and others, can be understood to correspond with the evening phase of the Day of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah declares:

Behold, the day of the Lord comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
To lay the land desolate;
And He will destroy its sinners from it.
For the stars of heaven and their constellations
Will not give their light;
The sun will be darkened in its going forth,
And the moon will not cause its light to shine. (Isaiah 13:9-10)

Similar language is used by the prophet Zephaniah, through whom the Lord declared: “I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem... that day is a

day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of thick clouds and thick darkness” (Zeph 1:4, 15-16). The prophet Joel, likewise describes that same day as “a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains” (Joel 2:2). He goes on to exclaim: “the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness... for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it” (Joel 2:10-11). Amos amplifies the darkness that characterizes the Day of the Lord, saying:

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!
For what good is the day of the Lord to you?
It will be darkness, and not light.
It will be as though a man fled from a lion,
And a bear met him!
Or as though he went into the house,
Leaned his hand on the wall,
And a serpent bit him!
Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light?
Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it? (Amos 2:18-20)

In this admonition, the prophet warns that though the Day of the Lord should be a day after which Israel should long, it will in fact be a day of great darkness for them. The prophet Jeremiah describes this day as follows: “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jer 30:7). This language makes it unmistakable that the trouble of this day will befall Israel, but it also carries with it a promise of Israel’s deliverance.

Morning – the Renewal of Zion

The second aspect of the Day of the Lord is that it is described by the prophets as bearing the character of irrepressible light. Zechariah captures the duality of this day when he describes it as one characterized by darkness after which it will see the dawning of morning’s light:

It shall come to pass in that day
That there will be no light;

The lights will diminish.
It shall be one day
Which is known to the Lord—
Neither day nor night.
But at evening time it shall happen
That it will be light. (Zech 14:6-7)

This description by the prophet may seem perplexing as it describes conditions where “there will be no light” and “the lights will diminish,” but that it is in fact “one day” where there will be “neither day nor night.” He then immediately follows by saying “at evening time it shall happen that it will be light,” which he goes on to specify that in that day “the Lord shall be King over all the earth” (Zech 14:9).

More than any other prophet, Isaiah has much to say about the character of that day. He clarifies that it is a day defined by the appointment of the Lord as King over Israel, upon the earth: “In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” (Isa 4:2-3). He elsewhere, goes on to explicitly state that on that day “the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem” (Isa 30:19), and that the character of that day is such that “the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound” (Isa 30:26). Isaiah likewise contrasts the gloom and darkness that will befall Israel with the dawning of light:

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed,
As when at first He lightly esteemed
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
And afterward more heavily oppressed her,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
In Galilee of the Gentiles.
The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;

Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined. (Isa 9:1-2)

That this day is brought upon by the coming of Christ, not merely as a child at the incarnation,
but upon His return for His coronation, is explicitly revealed in the subsequent verses:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots...
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist...

It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,
From Assyria and Egypt,
From Pathros and Cush,
From Elam and Shinar,
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.
He will set up a banner for the nations,
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
And gather together the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth. (Isa 11:1, 4-5, 11-12)

John also speaks prophetically of this same day, when he testifies concerning the coming
of the One upon who's head sits many crowns:

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was
called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were
like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no
one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is
called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and
clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that
with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.
He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He
has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS. (Rev 19:11-16)

This descent of the King of heaven, to the earth to assume His rightful place as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” whereby He will preside over the nations and “He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron” is the very moment David prophesied saying:

The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

Your people shall be volunteers
In the day of Your power;
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,
You have the dew of Your youth.
The Lord has sworn
And will not relent,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”

The Lord is at Your right hand;
He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.
He shall judge among the nations,
He shall fill the places with dead bodies,
He shall execute the heads of many countries.
He shall drink of the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He shall lift up the head. (Psalm 110)

From the testimonies of the prophets, spanning both the OT and the NT, it becomes rather evident that the prophetic Day of the Lord corresponds to the events disclosed in the Book of Revelation. The dual aspect of the one Day of the Lord, consisting of both evening and morning, seems to correlate with the tribulation period, as presented in chapters 5-19, followed by the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth, as presented in chapter 20.

The Church in Relation to the Day of the Lord

In light of what has been considered above concerning the nature of the Day of the Lord consisting of two distinct phases, including the evening/tribulation and the morning/millennium, the question remains as to the relationship of the Christian believer to either of these two

corresponding events that comprise the Day of the Lord. Thankfully, we are not left to speculation or mere inference. The apostle Paul answers this very question rather explicitly and directly in his letter to the Thessalonians:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10)

Evidently, the apostle has this two-aspect reference in mind concerning the nature of the Day of the Lord, when addressing the saints in Thessalonica. He specifies that the Day of the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly. However he uses the third person pronoun to specify that "sudden destruction comes upon them...and they shall not escape." He contrasts that by clarifying "but you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief." Moreover, he specifies that Christian believers are "all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness," as though to say, we are appointed for the millennial kingdom which dawns after the night, though we will be spared the destruction that will befall them. Paul understood full-well that the message of the prophets described the Day of the Lord as follows: "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate" (Isa 13:9) and "that day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of thick clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph 1:15-16). Nevertheless, he assured the Christian believers that: "God did not appoint us to wrath" (1 Thess 5:9). It should therefore be understood that Paul's message to the

saints of Thessalonica was that believers will not see the evening phase of the Day of the Lord. Though he simultaneously reassures them: “You are all sons of light and sons of the day” (1 Thess 5:5). In other words, the church’s expectation is that it will be spared from the tribulation, though it will participate in the millennium—albeit in another state, inasmuch as He “has made us kings and priests” (Rev 1:6) and “we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12).

Conclusion

For all the haranguing and apparent confusion over the meaning of Scripture’s use of the term “day,” it really is not as convoluted as some have made it out to be. The word can be used in one of a few ways: to describe a 24-hour period spanning from one sunrise or sunset to the next, or more narrowly that derivative span of from sunrise to sunset, or as a non-specified temporal reference defined by its adjectival or genitival modifier, whether explicit or implied. The prophetic expression the Day of the Lord manifestly falls into this third category, where the defining feature is that it is the time of the Lord’s judgment upon the earth. This single apocalyptic event possesses two discernable components, the fulfillment of which will be realized in the coming tribulation and the millennial kingdom. Just as the opening chapters of the book of Genesis reveal the model of a day consisting of an evening followed by a morning, so do the closing chapters of the book of Revelation reveal that the Day of the Lord is a single future event with two corresponding parts, beginning with the time of Jacob’s trouble and concluding with the Renewal of Zion.