

## The Day of the Lord

### A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 4

What is the “Day of the Lord”? Is it a single day or a designation for a period of time? Is it a good event or a fearful one? Did it already occur or is it still yet in the future? Does the “Day of the Lord” have the same meaning between the Old and New Testaments?

Introduced by major and minor prophets and influenced by God’s intervention in Israel’s early conflicts, the phrase “Day of the Lord” was used to place an emphasis on the swift and decisive nature of God’s victory over His enemies. Scholars believe that the idea was influenced by perceptions prevalent during the Ancient Near East that a mighty warrior – king can consummate an entire military campaign in a single day.

#### **Hebrew: Yôm YHWH**

When examining all instances of the “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament, the phrase is used to denote a future event, which can occur later as a historical event or as a reference to an eschatological event that will culminate the present age. Several additional observations can be made as well:

In cases where the prophetic “Day of the Lord” is fulfilled by a historical event, it becomes apparent that the “Day of the Lord” took place over a period of time instead of a single 24 hour day.

Some prophets may speak of the “Day of the Lord” with a reference to the same future historical event, and it could be in the near future (less than 100 years), distant future or eschatological future.

The “Day of the Lord” is a reference to divine judgment; it can be God’s judgment of people or a nation including the nation of Israel.

When God made the Mosaic Covenant, He warns the nation of Israel that, if they disobeyed, their punishment could include conquest by foreigners, exile from the land, and scattered about the earth (Deut 28:15-64); thus, God’s judgment was not arbitrary and avoidable.

While the “Day of the Lord” is a period of judgment, it is also associated with restoration and described with terms like healing, hope and joy. Often, when in reference to the eschatological future, the “Day of the Lord” is a deliverance of the regathered and repentant Israel.

The following chart attempts to observe the prophecies of the “Day of the Lord” with the benefit of the hindsight of history.

Day of the Lord Prophecy	Fulfillment by Historical Event
762 BC: Although he was from Judah, Amos prophesizes in the Northern Kingdom and pronounces judgment upon many nations and the twelve tribes. When the Day of the Lord is mentioned in Amos 5:18-20, Amos is directing his message to Israel (Amos 5:1). Believing that the Day of the Lord was a time that God will take vengeance upon Israel’s enemies, Israel did not realize that they became God’s enemy for their sins against the Mosaic Covenant.	725-722 BC: The Assyrian monarch Sargon II conquers the Northern Kingdom Israel (along with other nations enroute and nearby) and deports and scatters Hebrews within the Assyrian empire. This historical event is mentioned in 2 Kings 17:22-24.

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<b>Day of the Lord Prophecy</b>	<b>Fulfillment by Historical Event</b>
<p>739 BC: Speaking from Judah, Isaiah's "Day of the Lord" prophecy (Isa 13:6, 9) is a pronouncement of judgment against Babylon. In this prophecy, Isaiah indicates the coming of the Medes (Isa 13:17; 21:2), and mentions Cyrus, the king of the Medes, as God's anointed (Isa 45:1).</p>	<p>539 BC: Persian / Medes king Cyrus conquers and destroys Babylonia. Some 100 years after Isaiah, Jeremiah would prophesize that many kings would assail Babylon (Jer 50:41-42), and from Cyrus' conquest to 10 BC, Babylon suffered additional damage until it was annihilated as the result of changing hands with each new conquest by various kings.</p>
<p>740-BC(?): A locust plague devastates Judah, which the prophet Joel sees as God's judgment of the unfaithful. That present day disaster heralds an imminent "Day of the Lord" (Joel 1:15; 2:1). Like locusts, God's great army will present a sight that will strike terror in the hearts of men (Joel 2:11).</p>	<p>704 BC: Sennacherib devastates Judah but fails to take Jerusalem under king Hezekiah.</p>
<p>627 BC: From Judah, Zephaniah directs his "Day of the Lord" prophecy towards Judah (Zeph 1:7-18; 2:2-3) for their covenant infidelity. Here the phrase "the Day of the Lord" is used more than any other Old Testament book. In light of the gravity of God's judgment, his prophecy was fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar's second siege of Jerusalem (597 BC).</p> <p>593 BC: Ezekiel began his ministry as an exile in Babylon as the result of Nebuchadnezzar's second conquest of Judah (Ezek 1:1-2). While speaking primarily to the exiled, he prophesizes the coming destruction of Jerusalem, because of the Jews failure in being faithful to their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant. His "Day of the Lord" prophecies (Ezek 7:19; 13:5) portrays God's anger and especially towards the deceit of false prophets.</p> <p>586 BC: The book of Lamentations, believed to be authored by Jeremiah, makes a reference to the "Day of the Lord" as "the day of His anger" (Lam 2:1). Speaking in the past tense, Jeremiah refers to the fall of Jerusalem that has already taken place (586 BC).</p>	<p>605 BC: The Southern Kingdom Judah submits and becomes a vassal state to Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II. A limited number of nobility and promising youths are deported to Babylon.</p> <p>597 BC: Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin rebel and cause Nebuchadnezzar to invade Judah. Zedekiah is installed as a tributary king of Judah. This historical event is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:4-7, 10.</p> <p>586 B.C. Zedekiah revolts by making an alliance with Egyptian Pharaoh Hophra. King Nebuchadnezzar lays a second siege on Judah, which results in the complete destruction of Jerusalem. This second siege is detailed in 2 Chronicles 36:16-20.</p>
<p>604 BC: From Judah, Jeremiah prophesizes the "Day of the Lord" as a pronouncement of God's judgment against Egypt (Jer 46:10).</p> <p>Understanding the book of Jeremiah is complicated by how the prophecies of Jeremiah were compiled, because they lack chronological consistency. Much of Jeremiah's prophecies are grouped by subject despite being dated years apart. Jeremiah's prophecies of Egypt during this time can be seen in Jeremiah 37, 38, 42, 43, 44 and 46.</p> <p>593 BC: Ezekiel's "Day of the Lord" prophesy (Ezek 30:3) pronounces God's judgment of Egypt, and the event is also called "the day of Egypt" (Ezek 30:9).</p>	<p>586 BC: When Nebuchadnezzar lays his second siege of Jerusalem, Egypt sends an army in an attempt to bring relief to their ally. But the Egyptians are repulsed and Jerusalem falls.</p> <p>571-567 BC: Nebuchadnezzar invades Egypt and inflicts significant damage. The Nes-Hor statue inscription attests to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and devastation of Egypt.</p>

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The following chart attempts to observe the prophecies of the “Day of the Lord” with a view towards the eschatological future.

Day of the Lord Prophecy	Eschatological Future
740-BC(?): After using a current locust plague in Judea to figuratively warn of an impending “Day of the Lord” judgment, Joel speaks of the “Day of the Lord” in the eschatological future. It will come after God pours out His Spirit upon mankind (Joel 2:28-32), be a period of judgment, and deliverance for Believers (Joel 3:14).	On the day of Pentecost (about 33 AD), Peter refers to Joel 2:28-32 to explain the public spectacle of the apostles’ speaking in tongues; it is a consequence of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:15-24). While Peter asserts that the Messiah has come, Joel’s prophecy is in reference to the Messiah’s return, deliverance of Believers and judgment of non-Believers (Joel 3:3-21; Rev 19:11-19; 20:11-15; 21:10-27).
585 BC(?): Most scholars believe that Obadiah looks back at the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC) and responds to Edom’s delight in its fall (Lam 2:15-17; Ezek 35:11-15; 36:2-6). Obadiah’s prophetic “Day of the Lord” (Obad 1:15) pronounces God’s retaliation towards the enemies, and their arrogance, of His people.	God reestablishes His rule in human history when Jesus returns; but, it is uncertain if Obadiah 1:15 is in reference to the day Jesus returns or when He judges all of mankind (Rev 20:11-15) though it is more suggestive of the latter (Obad 1:17-21).
520 BC: Zechariah, a priest during Ezra and the restoration of Jerusalem, began his ministry two months after the completion of Haggai’s prophecies. It is considered by some as “the most messianic, most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament.” Zechariah does not specifically mention of the “Day of the Lord;” however, he speaks of “that day” in the context of the “Day of the Lord” (Zech 14:1-21).	Zechariah 14:1-21 appears to follow Revelation’s description of the nations gathering to make war (Rev 16:13-16) indicates that Zechariah’s “Day of the Lord” as the second coming of Jesus Christ (Rev 19:11-19).
440 BC: About 100 years after their return to Jerusalem, the Jews are confronted by the prophet Malachi for their indifference to the covenant and their shallow worship practices. Malachi’s “Day of the Lord” prophecy (Mal 4:5) pronounces a day of judgment.	Malachi’s references to the “Book of Remembrance” (Mal 3:16) and imagery of judgment indicate that the “Day of the Lord” is about Jesus and Final Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

**Greek: hēmera kyriou**

Throughout the Old Testament, the “Day of the Lord” was in context of YHWH; however, with the exception of his reference to Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:20, Peter spoke of the “Day of the Lord,” “Day of Judgment,” and the “Day of God” synonymously in the context of Jesus Christ.

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the **day of judgment**, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. (2 Pet 2:9-10)

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God (continues)

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the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the **day of judgment** and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the **day of the Lord** will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the **day of God**, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet 3:3-18)

Paul describes the second coming of Jesus Christ as sudden and unannounced. It will herald a time of punishment for non-Believers for their guilt of sin and a time of confirmation for those who placed their faith in Jesus Christ as atonement for their sins. Paul writes of this terrible day to inform Christians that judgment is in the future, and encourages them to remain steadfast and continue growing in their faith.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the **day of our Lord Jesus Christ**. (1 Cor 1:8)

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the **day of the Lord Jesus**. (1 Cor 5:5)

For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the **day of our Lord Jesus**. (2 Cor 1:13-14)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the **day of Christ** Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the **day of Christ**; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:6-11)

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the **day of the Lord** will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not  
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escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. (1 Thess 5:1-6)

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the **day of the Lord** has come. (2 Thess 2:1-2)

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim 4:7-8)

Omitting any reference to the "Day of the Lord," Jesus only speaks of the "Day of Judgment," and it is directed to non-Believers and in the context of Final Judgment.

Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the **day of judgment** than for that city. (Matt 10:14-15)

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the **day of judgment** than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the **day of judgment**, than for you." (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:10-16)

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the **day of judgment**. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt 12:33-37)

Between the Old and the New Testaments, the phrase "Day of the Lord" appears to have different purposes.

While the Old Testament "Day of the Lord" was a message of punishment, God used His prophets to bring His people to repentance and return to their covenant relationship with Him. Moses indicates that God's curses were precisely designed to teach the nation of Israel how to live a holy life.

So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. (Deut 30:1-5)

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The New Testament, on the other hand, does not use the phrase “Day of the Lord” as a call to return to a covenant relationship; instead, it is a warning that Final Judgment is coming. For Believers, it meant be stay faithful and not be deceived by false teachers. For non-Believers, it was a call to place your faith in Jesus Christ for the God is “patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

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