

The Day of Yahweh (Day of the Lord)

The phrase “day of Yahweh” (day of the LORD) occurs five times in the book of Joel—more than any other book of the Bible. The exact phrasing is found only in the Prophets and the New Testament, sixteen times and five times, respectively, though it is referred to in other texts (Isa. 2:12). It is a day of divine judgment.

In the Old Testament, it described the downfall of nations:

- Babylon (Isa. 13:6, 9)
- Egypt (Jer. 46:10; Eze. 30:3)
- Judah (Eze. 13:5; Joel; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5)
- Israel (Amos 5:18-20)
- Edom (Oba. 1:15)

In prophetic imagery, celestial lights— Sun, Moon, stars— were often used to represent earthly rulers or nations. The dimming or falling of these lights represented their downfall (Isa. 13:10; 14:12; Eze. 32:7-8). Other imagery accompanying God’s judgment upon earthly powers included the heavens shaking, God coming on the clouds, blood, the earth shaking, fire and smoke, and darkness (Isa. 13:13; 19:1; Hag. 2:6; Joel 2:2, 10, 30-31).

The “day of the Lord” for Judah is the focus of several prophecies, most notably Joel’s. Judah was devastated by a series of invasions culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonian army (2 Kings 25). The temple, city walls, and significant buildings were all destroyed, and the people were exiled. God promised restoration, and they returned in 536 BC to begin rebuilding. In 70 AD, another “day of the Lord” came upon Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1-34). The Jews had foolishly rebelled against their Roman overlords. Finally, the Roman army besieged the city, ultimately destroying the temple, killing many, and expelling the survivors. This was God’s final judgment upon the Jews for rejecting the Anointed One.

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The New Testament points forward to the future day of the Lord. But this one will not come upon certain nations as those in the past. Jesus will return, the dead will be raised, and every person will be judged. The saved will be taken to heaven to be with God forever, and the lost will be expelled from his presence eternally. In this final day, the physical earth and heavens will be destroyed (2 Peter 2:10-13). While prophecies sometimes provided a timeline or preceding signs for other days of the Lord, there is no such information for this one (Matt. 24:35-51). It will come "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). We know only that it will come someday and how we are to prepare.

The days of the Lord, while terrifying for the recipients of God's wrath, are also days of salvation for the saved. Violent enemies and tyrants were overthrown, and rampant sin was extinguished from the land. Now, faithful Christians look forward to the day of the Lord in which eternal life begins. To be saved, we must call upon the name of the Lord by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:21, 38; 22:16) and then live faithfully, repenting and praying if we fall into sin (Acts 8:22; Rev. 2:10).