

BIBLICAL PROPHECY—THINGS TO COME

Darkness and light: The Day of the Lordⁱ

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that **the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-5)

In these verses believers are called "brothers." Those who are saying, "Peace and safety," are unbelievers. God is reminding the Thessalonians that unbelievers will not escape judgment in the "Day of the Lord." However, believers are not in darkness, they are "sons of the light," sons of faith in Christ, and can look back on the accomplished salvation of Christ, which fulfilled Old Testament promises. They can look forward to the second coming of Christ, in the Day of the Lord, which consummates all of God's prophecy/promises.

The Day of the Lord was the high hope and the far-off goal of the Old Testament. It was, that toward which, the entire Old Testament program of God was moving. Everything in time and creation looked forward to and moved toward that day. The Old Testament era closed without it being realized, and up to today the Day of the Lord has not yet come.

The Old Testament closes with a great hope that although the sun has gone down on the nation of Israel because of their sins and it is very dark. There is coming a new day - the Day of the Lord - and the Sun of righteousness who will usher it in: *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings....* (Malachi 4:2)

But when we come to the New Testament, we find even there that the Day of the Lord had not come. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, we read that this Day of the Lord was still in the future: *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

The Day of the Lord was and is still in the future

So when Paul wrote this in about A.D. 51, the Day of the Lord was still in the future, and after almost 2000 years, it is one of the things to come; it is unfulfilled prophecy!

In the Old Testament the expression "the Day of the Lord" occurs five times in the Book of Joel, as a very brief prophecy. However, all other Old Testament prophets make reference to this momentous period of time, some using the terms "*the day*" or "*the great day*." You will find that references to the Day of the Lord occur seventy-five times in the Old Testament. It became such a familiar phrase and was such an understandable subject of the Old Testament that by the time of Zechariah, one of the last of the prophets, you will find that he could use the term "*in that day*" and it was understood that he meant the *Day of the Lord*. It was the great theme of the Old Testament.

The New Testament does not drop this doctrinal theme. It does not ignore the subject nor does it change it. Both Paul, in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Peter, in 2 Peter 3 both address it. The Day of the

Lord continued to be a very important part of the program of God in the Church era.

I want to suggest to you, that if believers understand what the Day of the Lord is and get the true picture that is set before us in the Word of God, they will be well on the way to getting a good grip on things to come and they will have the hope that John tells us about in his 1st epistle.

- *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).*

When Will It Come?

So, the question arises... is it possible to identify this period known as the Day of the Lord? Can we define it? Can we get it out of the realm of the nebulous and tenuous? Can we avoid thinking of it as a vague theory and a spurious theology? (as is done today, even in many of our churches and seminaries)

So, what are the boundaries to the Day of the Lord? First of all, it does not refer to a particular day... rather, as we'll see; it's a period of time. With certainty, we can see that the Day of the Lord has definite reference to the return of Christ to the earth to establish His earthly kingdom. That is made very clear in Old Testament prophecy.

Let's consider this important section of prophecy—of things to come, and note the language carefully:

- In Zechariah 14:1-4 we read... *A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.*

Here is a remarkable prophecy, a prophecy that says, "*Behold, the day of the Lord cometh....*". In verse 4, we read that Day of the Lord includes the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is coming to the earth... it says specifically that His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives. So, we know that the second coming of Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom is part of the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is also associated, by Old Testament prophets, with the millennial kingdom that is to be established on this earth. In fact, the kingdom is equally as great a theme of the Old Testament as is the Day of the Lord. Therefore, the Day of the Lord includes the kingdom.

Read... Zechariah 14:9 And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.

Then the verses following give actual details as to what will happen in that day... revealing that Jerusalem is to become the very center of the kingdom. Our Lord called it the city of the great king and our Lord shall be king in Jerusalem in "that day." So now we know that the Day of the Lord includes the second coming of Christ when He establishes His kingdom, and that it also includes His 1000 year kingdom reign. The New Testament confirms this in Rev 11:15... *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

The Day of the Lord includes the millennial kingdom up to the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth which occur at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ. It extends therefore to the new

heavens, the very beginning of eternity-future. However, we need to determine when it begins so we need to turn to the book of Daniel.

70th Week of Daniel

When studying the Book of Daniel, we find a great deal of information pertaining to the future of the nation Israel. Most significant is the "70 weeks of Daniel" in chapter 9. The Hebrew word "shabua" translated by our English word "week" literally means "seven." Therefore seventy weeks are seventy sevens... meaning $70 \times 7 = 490$ years. The context in the Book of Daniel determines that "sevens" is being used as a unit of time and refers to years.

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives in Babylon and God gave him some specific information - including actual dating - as to the end of their captivity, their return to Israel, and their rebuilding of Jerusalem as seen in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. That fits into secular history from 445 B.C. to 397 B.C. so, the first week was literally fulfilled at that point in history.

Then, the second period consisted of 430 years - from 397 B.C. until Christ came. In the Gospels, we see that the very day Christ marched into Jerusalem, presenting himself as the Messiah, was the exact fulfillment of this. In fact, according to the lunar calendar which Israel followed, it was right up to the very minute!

After the 483 years, there is a time break, and two events of utmost importance take place: Daniel's prophecy tells us, "*Messiah [will] be cut off*" - this means the crucifixion of Christ. Also Jerusalem would be destroyed by the "*people of the prince*" ... this was fulfilled when the Romans under Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

It's important to note that God's revelation to Daniel had nothing to say about the church age. He was saying that there were 490 years that pertained to Daniel's people, which is the nation Israel. Today there are seven years (the seventieth week) of this period, pertaining to God's program for Israel, that **have not yet** taken place.

However, in the New Testament we find that something new has been added... the Church is brought before us. We learn that after Messiah was "cut off," meaning that he died and was buried... he rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and there took place something new: The calling out of a body of believers called "the church." And the calling out has been going on for nearly 2000 years.

The next thing on God's program for the Church is the Rapture... the imminent coming of Christ for His church. We see that Paul, in effect, said to the Thessalonian Christians who were weeping for their loved ones who had died, "*Sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. Of course you sorrow, but you have a hope!*" (1 Thessalonians 5:13.) What hope was he writing about??"

Read... 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel; and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

The Bible says that those who **believe** Jesus died and rose again "*shall be caught up*" to heaven. Then, in heaven, there will take place the judgment for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ to see whether they are to receive a reward or not (2 Corinthians 5:10).

However, it is important for us to know about the momentous things that will be happening on the earth during that period. The Great Tribulation will take place, designated in the Old Testament as the "seventieth week of Daniel." It is the seven-year period of "the things to come" that will complete the 70 weeks, the conclusion of the 490 years of the prophecy God revealed to Daniel. It pertains to the nation Israel, and it will be concluded by the return of Christ to the earth as Zechariah chapter 14, verse 4, says: "*His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.*"

However, when Christ calls His own—the Church out of the earth and into the air to meet Him, His feet won't be touching the Mount of Olives. His taking of His church out of the world is the event we call the Rapture of the church and we can see that it triggers the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. Then the Great Tribulation will take place here on earth, and at the end of that 7 year period Christ will return to establish His kingdom on this earth. During those seven years, the earth will be under a world dictator who will combine both religion and politics. He will bring the ecumenical movement under one head, and only he himself will be worshiped as god.

Paul's epistle reveals this fact, so does John in the Book of Revelation, and in the Old Testament Daniel confirms it. This world dictator, called the Antichrist, will show himself as god in the temple of God. He also will be the political ruler, the dictator of the entire world. No one can break his rule on this earth except Christ at His second coming.

At his second advent, the Lord Jesus Christ will come in judgment to establish His kingdom, and that kingdom will last for 1000 years... which we now call "The Millennium." His coming to the earth is the physical revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Rapture is the great theme of 1 Thessalonians, while the Revelation—Christ's second coming to the earth, is the theme of 2 Thessalonians. The interesting thing is that all of this is called "**the Day of the Lord**" in the Bible. We see that it spans the 1007 year period of time beginning with the rapture of the Church... and, includes the tribulation, the 2nd advent, the earthly kingdom, and the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers.

We have something to look at here that is very important for us to see. We know that the Day of the Lord begins at the Rapture when God takes His church out of the world... because we're told very definitely in the Bible that the Day of the Lord comes without warning. The Day of the Lord begins when the church leaves the earth, and that triggers the Great Tribulation Period on the earth followed by the coming of Christ to the earth, for which the Bible says that there will be many signs to know that his return is imminent.

Evening begins the day

Now I want you to notice something else very interesting in the Scriptures... the Hebrew day always began with sundown; it never began with sunrise as it did for the gentile calendar. In Genesis, the very first chapter, it says, "The evening and the morning were the first day The evening and the morning were the second day.... The evening and the morning were the third day...."

The Bible tells us the Day of the Lord begins in darkness... at sundown. A great many people think the Day of the Lord means the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom... that is, his 2nd advent. However, the prophets make it very clear that this is not what they are talking about at all... the Day of the Lord is always associated with judgment.

Read... Joel 2:1-2 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-- a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

Our Lord Himself took the prophet Joel's expression of judgment and called it the Great Tribulation. He said as recorded in Matthew 24:21-22, "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved*" [that is, not survive]. There would be nothing like it before, nothing like it afterward. And Joel said that the Day of the Lord begins with *darkness and gloominess*. It begins with the Great Tribulation Period, a time of darkness, just as the Hebrew day must begin.

This is the whole tenor of Scripture.... you will find that all the references to the Day of the Lord identify it with judgment. Listen to this language in the Book of Ezekiel: *For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the nations* (Ezekiel 30:3). Do you notice what Ezekiel said? "The day of the Lord is near, a *cloudy day*." He agrees with Joel.

Now notice the language used by Isaiah: *Wail; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners out of it* (Isaiah 13:6, 9). The Day of the Lord, you see, is always associated with judgment. That is the way you find it in the Word of God.

Now we turn to what is probably one of the most remarkable prophecies on this subject that we have in the entire Bible. It's found in the first chapter of the little prophecy of Zephaniah:

The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hastens greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath [the Great Tribulation is called a Day of Wrath], a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities, and against the high towers.

And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath, but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy; for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

You see, it is a time of judgment. The great day of His wrath is come, and it's the time of judgment upon the earth. This is the picture the Bible presents to us for the Great Tribulation. Joel confirms it again: *And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong who executes his word; for the Day of the LORD is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?* (Joel 2: 11)

Now, my friends, all of these references relate the Day of the Lord to a period of judgment. Therefore the Day of the Lord will begin with night - the night of delusion, distress, and desolation.

From darkness to light

However, it is **always** God's plan to move from darkness to light, I repeat, **always!** We find God's first recorded words in the Book of Genesis when he tells us about his creative acts. Genesis 1:2 tells us, "*Now the earth was formless and empty, **darkness** was over the surface of the deep...*" In Genesis 1:3-5 we read, "*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the **darkness**. God called the light "day," and the **darkness** he called "night." And there was **evening**, and there was morning--the first day.*"

Where there is darkness, God moves in with light. Where there is sin, He moves in with salvation... it is His will, his grace, his mercy, his love, and his plan of judgment and salvation. And though the great Day of the Lord opens with judgment, it leads to light. There is both darkness and light in the Day of the Lord.

It is important to keep in mind that the Day of the Lord comes without warning. We noted in all those passages the thought of its coming quickly. This doesn't mean it is coming soon, but when it comes, it strikes suddenly! If the Lord Jesus took the church off this earth tonight, the Bible says, the Day of the Lord would break on this earth tomorrow... it would break suddenly!

You see, at the Rapture when God removes the Church He will also remove something else - a Restrainer. The Holy Spirit is the Restrainer; though He would still be in the world to convict of sin he would not be restraining evil. Today He is holding back evil, through the Church worldwide, in order that the gospel might continue to go out. He will do that up to the very moment the church leaves the world. Then, when that takes place, evil will break like a great flood or a dam giving way, and a flood of evil and of great judgment will come over this earth in the Great Tribulation.

But the return of Christ to this earth to establish His kingdom, at the end of the Tribulation, does have signs connected to it. But remember, there's not a sign given to the Church for the time of the Rapture... which may be at any moment. It can take place at any time, and no man can set a date. We can't even say it may be soon... we do not know.

Somebody said to me, "Well, it may be this year that He will come." I said, "Don't say that, because the minute you begin to talk about dates, you contradict the Lord Jesus who said, '*In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh*' (Matthew 24:44)." When He takes the Church out of the world... that moment is called the Day of Christ. In Philippians 1:6 the Lord says to us, "*Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ*"... that is the great hope that was before the church in the time of the apostles... and every day since. It should be every believers hope for it is "*the hope that purifies.*"

As we have already seen, the Day of the Lord begins when Christ takes the church out of the world. And though it begins in darkness, it is certainly light for those who were taken out... the children of God. The Day of Christ ends at the Rapture, and the Day of the Lord begins at that point. In the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea, there are some wonderful verses that speak of this period. Note the picture that's given here in Hosea 3:4, "*For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.*"

That's the period we're living in today. It has been true now for many years that Israel has not had a place of sacrifice. Then God says, "*Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David, their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days* (Hosea 3:5). So when Christ comes to this earth to establish His millennial kingdom, this verse will be fulfilled.

The Day of the Lord, I trust you can see, is both a technical term; and, also, a theological term that embraces many momentous acts of God. You and I today are living in the Day of Salvation, but that doesn't mean a 24-hour day. It doesn't really have reference to time but to a particular period. And that Day of Salvation for us ends when He takes the church out... then the Day of the Lord begins... this is the great picture that is given to us in Scripture.

God's scenario

The Day of the Lord, we see, begins with the Rapture which happens "*in the twinkling of an eye*" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Then comes the Great Tribulation... and the Day of the Lord extends through the seven years of the Great Tribulation Period (Revelation 6 - 18). It includes the return of Christ to the earth (Revelation 19) when He returns to establish His kingdom.

Then in Revelation 20, we see that Satan is bound while Christ reigns one thousand years on the earth. Satan is then released for a little while. And during that future day when Satan is loose for a brief period, he will lead a rebellion that Christ will put down.

The Great White Throne is also brought before us in Revelation 20: 11-15. It is the place of God's final judgment for those from the beginning of time who, by free will, have rejected God... the unbelievers. Prior to the Great White Throne, we see that the lost dead are resurrected (given some sort of body) and the "*small and great*" stand before God.

Believers are commanded to "Watch" and "Wait"

I think that we're living in a day when the attitude toward the future is becoming more important. There has never been a time when so much attention was given to it. People years ago paid very little attention to the future, but now it is important to us. We find that the serious thinkers of the world are pondering and speculating in terms of the future. Should not *God's* people also think in those terms? Our Lord urged us to do so, if you please. The fact of the matter is one of the great injunctions that God has given his children, is to stay alert and watch.

I want you to notice what He had to say in the Olivet Discourse as He was speaking of His coming to the earth to establish His kingdom: "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.*" (Matthew 24:42, 43)

Is the Lord Jesus coming as a thief for the church? No. It is not the thief we're looking for. We're "*looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2:13). You'll notice that this is the very thing Paul deals with when writing to the Thessalonian believers: "*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4)

My friend, our Lord will not come for His church as a thief but when He comes to the earth to establish His kingdom, He will come as a thief... breaking into this world, interfering with men's little plans and programs. Unbelievers, called "the world" in Scripture does not want Christ to come; they're in rebellion against Him. But He's going to break through one of these days. And before He does, He's going to take His own out of the world. And they are watching and waiting, "*looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2: 13).

The minute that Christ takes His Church—the body of Christ out of the world on the "Day of Christ,"

the period of His grace—the Church age ends. Then there takes place the time of His wrath. The great Day of the Lord is darkness, not light, for the Great Tribulation breaks on the earth with a world dictator who will establish an ecumenical movement and a world political movement.

Nothing can deter it except the return of Christ... he will break through like a thief, intruding into this world, establishing His kingdom on this earth. It will be a period in which He will reign on this earth for a thousand years. It ends by the new heavens and the new earth being established and with those who are His own living in the New Jerusalem.

This is God's program... it is Truth and Light from the Light of the World; the Light that shines in the darkness! The Word of God tells us that we know not what a day will bring forth, but every child of God knows that we have a wonderful Shepherd and that we can never be taken out of our Shepherd's hands - either in time or in eternity. It is reassuring to know that our Shepherd has a program for the future. This gives hope, purpose, and direction to life.

I do not know about you, but for me it adds a great deal of color to the drabness of living down here on this earth... it is an incentive today to live for God; it fills me “*with peace that passes understanding!*”

What about the future for you? Suppose Christ does come this year. Unless you are trusting Him as your Savior, there is nothing ahead of you but the day of judgment that will take place on this earth in the “Day of the Lord.”

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3: 16-17). My friend **today** is the day of salvation.*

Now I'm going to let the Apostle Peter conclude this message on the Day of the Lord with the information that God gave him on this great subject:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him (2 Peter 3:3-15).

ⁱ Based on sermon by J. Vernon McGee, TTB.org, Pasadena, CA 91109