

**DAY OF THE LORD.** “The Day of the Lord” (= “the Day of Yahweh”) is a central feature of the prophets’ message to their contemporaries. This phrase and such closely related expressions as “the day of the anger of Yahweh,” or “Yahweh has a day,” occur over two dozen times in prophetic books (most frequently in Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah), and once in Lamentations ([2:22](#)). Similar terms, particularly “that day,” “the day of,” and “the day when,” appear nearly 200 times in the prophets, occasionally in Lamentations, and twice in Psalms ([Pss 110:5](#); [137:7](#)). These terms often are used interchangeably with the fuller expressions or in contexts that refer specifically to one or the other of them, e.g., [Isa 2:12–22](#) (see vv [12](#), [17](#), [20](#)); [Jer 46:10](#); [Ezek 7:5–27](#) (see vv [7](#), [10](#), [12](#), [19](#)); and [Ezek 30:2–3](#). In most instances, the same ranges of meaning are suggested.

[A. Yahweh’s Judgment against Foreign Nations](#)

[B. Yahweh’s Judgment against Israel, Judah, or the Jewish People](#)

[C. Future Deliverance or Blessing for Israel, Judah, Other Nations, and All Creation](#)

[D. Day of the Lord in the NT](#)

[E. Scholarly Literature](#)

#### **A. Yahweh’s Judgment against Foreign Nations**

A few scattered passages seem to refer to Yahweh’s previous acts of judgment against foreign nations. “The day of Midian” ([Isa 9:4](#)) refers to the Midianites’ earlier defeat. Most other such expressions refer to Yahweh’s future punishment of various nations, e.g., [Jer 50:31](#) (to Babylon, “your day has come”); [Ezek 21:29](#) (the “day of the Ammonites”); [Ezek 26:18](#); [27:27](#) (“day of the fall” or “ruin” of Tyre); [Ezek 32:10](#) (to Egypt, “the day of your downfall”).

Most of the prophetic books contain oracles against foreign nations. The “Day of Yahweh” and similar expressions frequently appear in these oracles. Commentators generally agree that in Amos’ time “the Day of Yahweh” popularly was thought to mean the time when Yahweh would vindicate Israel by defeating its enemies. See the expressions “day of battle” and “day of the whirlwind” in Amos’ denunciation of the Ammonites ([1:14](#)). In contrast, Amos warns his Israelite hearers that “the Day of Yahweh” will not be what they wanted ([Amos 5:18](#), [20](#). See part [B](#), below.). Several later prophets declared that the Day of Yahweh would be one of disaster for certain other nations, namely, Egypt ([Isa 19:16](#); [20:6](#); [Jer 46:10](#), [21](#); [Ezek 30:9](#), [18](#)), Edom ([Isa 34:8](#); [63:4](#); [Jer 49:22](#)), Ethiopia ([Ezek 30:9](#)), Babylon ([Isa 47:9](#); [Jer 50:27](#), [30](#), [31](#); [51:2](#)), the Ammonites ([Ezek 21:29](#)), Damascus ([Jer 49:26](#)), Moab ([Jer 48:41](#)), the Philistines ([Jer 47:4](#)), and Tyre ([Isa 23:15](#)). A few prophetic texts suggest that “that day” will be one of judgment against many or even all nations: [Isa 24:21](#) (“the kings of the earth”; cf. [Ps 110:5–6](#)), [Jer 25:33](#) (see [25:30–32](#) for context), [Ezek 30:2–5](#) (particularly Arabia, Egypt, and other African nations), [Joel 3:14](#) (see [3:11–12](#) for context), and [Obadiah 15–16](#). The Ezekiel and Obadiah passages warned that the day was “near.” Zechariah declared that “on that day” Yahweh would destroy all the nations opposed to Jerusalem ([Zech 12:3–9](#); [14:12–13](#)). See also [Ezek 38:17–39:8](#) as to the fate in store for Gog and Magog. David Noel Freedman et al., eds., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

Zephaniah proclaimed more broadly that YHWH would destroy “all the inhabitants of the earth” on the day of his wrath ([Zeph 1:7–18](#)). According to [Isa 2:12–17](#) Yahweh’s “day” will be a time of judgment not only against the pride of men, but against “all that is proud and lofty.” The author of [Isa 13:6–13](#) declared that the whole world would be punished for its evil on the Day of Yahweh which was then “near.” The Isaiah Apocalypse announced that “on that day” Yahweh would even punish the cosmic powers ([Isa 24:21–22](#)), and the quasi-cosmic sea monsters ([Isa 27:1](#)).

## **B. Yahweh’s Judgment against Israel, Judah, or the Jewish People**

Yahweh’s past judgment (on “the day of his anger”) is emphasized in Lamentations, with reference to the events marking the end of the S kingdom of Judah and the beginning of the Exile ([Lam 1:12](#); [2:1, 21–22](#)). Compare [Obad 11–14](#) and [Ps 137:7](#), where “the day” of Judah or Jerusalem signifies the same events, which, however, are not viewed as Yahweh’s judgment, but only as evil deeds perpetrated by their enemies. [Isaiah 22:1–14](#) may also refer to an already experienced “day” of Yahweh’s judgment. [Ezekiel 21:25](#) states that “the day” of a prince of Israel “has come,” but the context suggests that his punishment had yet to occur.

Characteristically, the classical prophets warned their contemporaries in Israel and Judah that “the Day of Yahweh” would soon come upon them in the form of cosmic or meteorological catastrophes or of powerful enemy armies which would bring Yahweh’s judgment against them for breaking the covenant requirements of the law. Thus Amos warned Israel that the day of Yahweh would be “darkness, and not light” ([Amos 5:18, 20](#); cf. [Joel 2:1–2](#)). The prophets point to Yahweh as the one who will ultimately cause the coming disasters as judgment against his people; most of them refer to “the Day of Yahweh” (or equivalent terms) in this connection. Examples include [Amos 2:13–16](#); [3:14](#); [8:3, 9](#); [Hos 1:4–5](#); [5:9](#); [Isa 3:18–4:1](#); [7:18–20, 23](#); [10:3](#); [22:5](#); [Mic 2:4](#); [Jer 17:16–18](#) (“the day of disaster,” “the day of evil”); [18:17](#) (“the day of their calamity”); [39:16](#); [Ezek 7:7–12, 19](#); [13:5](#); [24:25–27](#); [38:14–19](#); [Zeph 1:7–18](#); [2:1–3](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1–2, 11, 31](#); [Mal 4:1, 5](#). Second Isaiah, Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum, which looked only for Yahweh’s blessings on Israel or Judah or for disaster for other nations, do not include this usage.

In general, the preexilic prophets proclaimed that God would punish Israel or Judah through oppression by other nations; e.g., [Hos 11:5](#); [Amos 3:9–11](#); [Isa 5:26–30](#). After the Exile, when the nations Israel and Judah had ceased to exist, prophets looked for Yahweh’s judgment against the Jewish people in one of two forms: “natural” disasters, such as plagues, drought, and crop failure, or “supernatural” demonic hordes, as in [Hag 1:5–6](#); [2:14–19](#); [Mal 3:9–12](#); [Joel 2:1–11](#).

Some texts indicate belief that the Day of Yahweh was near: [Ezek 7:7, 12](#); [22:4](#); [Joel 2:1](#); [3:14](#); [Zeph 1:7](#). A few others state that the day “comes” or “is coming,” implicitly in the near future—e.g., [Ezek 7:10](#); [39:8](#) and [Mal 4:1](#). [Malachi 3:1–2](#) warns that Yahweh’s “messenger” is coming and warns of “the day of his coming,” when he would cause the priests to offer right offerings. None of the prophetic texts, however, that look for the “Day of Yahweh” as a time of judgment against Israel, Judah, or the Jewish people refers to the “coming” of a messiah or of Yahweh himself in connection with it.

### C. Future Deliverance or Blessing for Israel, Judah, Other Nations and All Creation

Some 60 occurrences of “the Day of Yahweh” and similar expressions refer to the future time when Yahweh would reestablish the fortunes of Israel/Judah or the Jewish people. A few, particularly in Isaiah, look for the redemption of other nations as well: [Isa 2:2–4](#) (= [Mic 4:1–3](#)); [11:10](#); [19:18–25](#); [25:6–9](#); [Zech 2:11](#).

Relatively few of these texts explicitly mention a future messiah or Davidic king: [Isa 11:10](#); [Jer 23:5–6](#); [30:8–9](#); [33:15–16](#); [Hag 2:23](#); [Zech 3:8–10](#); [Amos 9:11](#); cf. [Hos 2:2](#). (Some messianic passages do not refer to the Day of Yahweh or related terms, e.g., [Isa 9:6–7](#); [Ezek 34:23–24](#); [37:24–25](#); [Zech 6:9–13](#); [9:9–10](#).) More typical are texts that look for Yahweh himself to act ([Mal 3:17](#); [4:3](#)), manifest his glory ([Isa 2:11](#), [17](#), [19](#); [Ezek 39:13](#)), and rule as king over a restored Israel ([Mic 4:6–7](#)) or over all the earth ([Isa 2:2–4](#) = [Mic 4:1–3](#); [Obad 21](#); [Zech 2:11](#); [14:9](#)) on that day.

On or in anticipation of that new day, according to Isaiah, those who had been sick or disabled would be restored to full health: [Isa 29:18–19](#); [30:26](#); cf. [Mic 4:6–7](#). Then all will enjoy the preternatural abundance of milk, honey, fruit, and produce ([Isa 4:2](#); [7:21–22](#); [25:6–9](#); [30:23–24](#); [Joel 3:18](#); [Amos 9:13–15](#)). Every man shall sit with his neighbor under his own vine and fig tree ([Mic 4:4](#); [Zech 3:10](#)); peace will obtain throughout all creation ([Hos 2:18](#); [Isa 11:1–10](#); cf. [Ezek 34:25–28](#)); and all Israel ([Isa 10:20](#); [52:6](#); [Ezek 39:22](#)), if not all nations ([Isa 19:19–25](#); cf. [Ezek 38:23](#)), will know that Yahweh is God. In that day exiled Jews will return ([Isa 11:11–12](#); [27:12–13](#); [Jer 27:22](#)), and Jerusalem and the Jewish people will experience God’s special favor ([Isa 12:1–4](#); [28:5–6](#); [30:26](#); [Jer 31:1–6](#); [Ezek 36:33–36](#); [Zeph 3:11–20](#); [Zech 9:16–17](#); [14:1](#); [Mal 3:17](#)).

### D. Day of the Lord in the NT

This and similar terms often occur in NT contexts referring to the future appearance of Jesus. In reading the Greek OT (or LXX), Jews and early Christians very likely rendered the OT expression “Day of Yahweh” as “Day of the Lord.” Early Christian leaders likely took over the OT expression but now understood it to refer to Jesus’ return as their Lord, as the Christ, or as the supernatural Son of Man. See [DAY OF CHRIST](#) and [DAY OF JUDGMENT](#).

### E. Scholarly Literature

For many years OT scholars have accepted the view that Israelites up to the time of Amos regarded the Day of Yahweh as that time when Yahweh would deliver Israel by punishing foreign nations and that Amos radically altered this understanding by proclaiming that on that day Yahweh would also punish Israel for all her offenses ([Amos 1:1–3:2](#)). See Bright (1955: 60–70).

Not all agree as to the nature of Israelite beliefs concerning the Day of Yahweh before the time of Amos, and at least two books (Nahum and Obadiah) attributed to prophets well after the time of Amos consist entirely of oracles against foreign nations. There is wide agreement, however, that for most of the prophets, the Day of Yahweh meant that time in the relatively near future when Yahweh would punish not only his people’s enemies, but also his people (Israel, Judah, or the Jewish people) for

David Noel Freedman et al., eds., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

Page 3. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 12:37 PM April 6, 2017.

breaking the covenant. Then, either through a new Davidic king or messiah or by acting directly, Yahweh would establish his own rule or kingdom over all the earth. See Robinson (1946: 135–47); Baab (1949: 156–97); and Jacob (1958: 319–21). See, generally, Muilenburg (1961: 128–50); Heschel (1962: 159–94); and Hiers (1988).

There have been a variety of other suggestions, however, particularly as to the origins of biblical traditions concerning the Day of Yahweh. Mowinckel (1956: 143–54) urged that the prophetic expectation of a coming Day of Yahweh derived from a cultic New Year Festival which celebrated Yahweh's enthronement as king and gave expression to hope for the beginning of a new era of blessing. Others, following von Rad (1959), have concluded that the Day of Yahweh represented Yahweh as "Holy Warrior" who had overwhelmed Israel's enemies in battle in the past, and would do so again. Thus Hanson (1975: 354–401) interprets [Zechariah 12–14](#) as the work of a visionary group which looked for Yahweh to punish particularly the Jerusalem temple hierarchy, deliver the faithful from foreign hordes, and renew the order of nature. Everson (1974), on the other hand, finds that the Day of Yahweh passages do not justify any of the theories as to the origin of the expression. He observes that several of these passages refer to different historical events. On that basis he concludes that the prophets likewise looked for separate future events of divine judgment or deliverance and that interpreters therefore should refer to the prophets' beliefs concerning the Days rather than to a single Day of Yahweh.

### **Bibliography**

Baab, O. 1949. [The Theology of the OT](#). New York.

Bright, J. 1955. [The Kingdom of God](#). New York.

Everson, A. J. 1974. [The Days of Yahweh](#). *JBL* 93: 329–37.

Hanson, P. D. 1975. [The Dawn of Apocalyptic](#). Philadelphia.

Heschel, A. J. 1962. [The Prophets](#). New York.

Hiers, R. H. 1988. [Reading the Bible Book by Book](#). Philadelphia.

Jacob, E. 1958. [Theology of the OT](#). Trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock. New York.

Mowinckel, S. 1956. [He That Cometh](#). Trans. G. W. Anderson. New York.

Muilenburg, J. 1961. [The Way of Israel](#). New York.

Rad, G. von. 1959. [The Origin of the Day of Yahweh](#). *JSS* 4: 97–108.

Robinson, H. W. 1946. [Inspiration and Revelation in the OT](#). Oxford.

RICHARD H. HIERS

David Noel Freedman et al., eds., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

Page 4. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 12:37 PM April 6, 2017.