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The Day of the Lord: Theme and Pattern in Biblical Theology*

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TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

The traditional understanding of the day of the Lord in Western Christian theology has generally followed Augustine, who set forth his view on the subject in the *City of God*. He wrote, “The whole church of the true God holds and professes the belief that Christ will come down from Heaven to judge the living and the dead. This is what we call *the last day*, the day of the divine judgment. We also call it *the last time*, for it is not certain how many days this judgment will take, since anyone who reads the sacred scriptures, even negligently, knows that the word *day* is often used in them to mean time. Also when we speak of the day of God’s judgment we add the word *last* or *final* for God is judging even now.”¹

In his letters to Hesychius, in which Augustine again gave a detailed explanation of his eschatological ideas, he cited various biblical texts in which “the day of the Lord” appears. For example in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–5 Paul wrote that his readers were well aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief. In his comments on these texts Augustine typically substituted the term “the last day” for “the day of the Lord.” In his view these terms represent the judgment complex that will include the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. He also wrote of the day as “the end of the world” or “the end of time” in conjunction with his well-known distinction between time and eternity. Another term he often used is “the day of judgment,” which is taken from the Lord’s pronouncement of woes on Galilean cities in Matthew 11:22, 24 and is used later in 2 Peter 3 interchangeably with “the day of the Lord.” Augustine did

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¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.1, in *Augustine, The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 965.

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note that some of the New Testament texts that seem to speak of the last judgment may actually refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century.²

For Augustine the future day of the Lord is a complex of events that will mark the close of the present age and the beginning of the age to come. It may extend over many days in order to accomplish its main features, which, as noted, will include the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment.

Augustine's concept of the day of the Lord as he understood its usage in the New Testament dominated the history of Christian thought. Almost fifteen hundred years later Charles Hodge identified what he called "church doctrine" on this issue. By "church doctrine" he meant "doctrine which is held by the church universal; [that is, that which is held] by Romanists, by Protestants in the west, and by the Greeks in the east." According to this "doctrine" there will be a "final judgment" a "definite future event ... when the eternal destiny of man and angels shall be finally determined and publically manifested."³

Most of the passages cited by Hodge were those that were cited by Augustine. They include the woes on the cities of Galilee in which the Lord used the phrase "the day of judgment" (Matt. 11:24); the parable of the wheat and the tares, which speaks of the judgment at the end of the age (13:39–40); and passages that speak of the last day, a day, or the day of wrath and judgment (John 12:48; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5). Hodge referred to the phrase "the day of the Lord" as indicating a period of time, but he offered no contextual study of the phrase. However, he disputed the premillenarian view common in his day that the day of the Lord covers the entire millennial period. In contrast Hodge said that the day of the Lord is a "definite and limited period," "not a protracted period or dispensation."⁴

An example of the premillennial view of the day of the Lord that concerned Charles Hodge can be seen in the published essays of the 1878 New York Prophetic Conference. One of the essays was "The Judgment, or Judgments" by J. T. Cooper.⁵ Cooper claimed that the day of judgment, otherwise known as the last day, or the day of the Lord, is "the

² Augustine, *Epistulae (ad Hesychius)* 197, 199. For a contemporary English translation see *Saint Augustine, Letters*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, vol. 4 of *The Fathers of the Church* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), 347–50, 356–401.

³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1872–1873; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 3:845–46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:846.

⁵ J. T. Cooper, "The Judgment, or Judgments," in *The Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference Held in the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City*, ed. Nathaniel West (Chicago: Revell, 1879), 241–69.

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whole of the millennial dispensation.”⁶ This would seem to be a logical implication of premillennialism, for if the day of the Lord includes the parousia, the resurrection, and final judgment, and if a thousand years divides the parousia and the resurrection of the just from the resurrection of the unjust and the final judgment, then the day of the Lord must extend over at least one thousand years. However, this raises questions about its character since the day of the Lord is the day of judgment. How can the day of the Lord be a day of judgment if it is mostly the millennial reign of Christ? The millennium seems to eclipse the judgment and change the character of the day. In his essay Cooper gave the standard premillennial response by denying the problem. Since one of the distinguishing features of “that day” is judgment, and since it will last for a thousand years, the entire millennial period is one of judgment. “It opens with judgment; it has judgment running through it, and it closes with the judgment of the Great White Throne.”⁷ Citing a number of passages that speak of the saints reigning with Christ and sharing in the authority of the kingdom, Cooper interpreted these as an ongoing process of judgment (Dan. 7; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26; 20:4). Exactly what part the risen saints will have in these judgments, Cooper did not say; he did not develop this view further.

This view of the day of the Lord as a millennium of judgment was shared by Lewis Sperry Chafer. He wrote, “In that time, the believers will not only share in Christ’s reign and the judgments of mankind (1 Cor. 6:2) but also in His judgments of the angels (1 Cor. 6:3). The judgment of angels continues throughout the thousand years (1 Cor. 15:25–26).”⁸ Chafer referred here to 1 Corinthians 15:25–26, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”⁹ This aspect of subduing enemies is the protracted judgment, Chafer said, of the millennial period. Clearly Chafer and others saw the millennial kingdom as not simply a time of peace but also a time for carrying out judgment throughout the heavens and the earth.

The common premillennial view on the day of the Lord in the early twentieth century was expressed in the notes of *The Scofield Study Bible*: “The day of Jehovah (called, also, ‘that day,’ and the ‘great day’) is that lengthened period of time beginning with the return of the Lord in glory, and ending with the purgation of the heavens and the earth by fire preparatory to the new heavens and the new earth (Isa. 65:17–19; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 21:1).”¹⁰ Dispensational premillennialists, however, faced another problem: How does the rapture relate to the day of the Lord? According to Scofield the day of the Lord will conclude the tribulation and will extend through the millennium to the final judgment.

⁶ Ibid., 247.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:398.

⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁰ C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1349 n. 1.

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The rapture will occur seven years before the day of the Lord, that is, before the tribulation will begin. However, several New Testament verses seem to associate the rapture with the day of the Lord. Some of these, such as 1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 10; and 2:16, use variant expressions in which “day” is joined with “of Christ,” “of Jesus,” “of Jesus Christ,” or “of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus an early dispensational solution to the problem was to view “the day of Christ” and “the day of the Lord” as two different events, the former associated with the rapture and the latter involving Christ’s second coming and subsequent judgments extending through the millennium. This is the approach taken in *The Scofield Study Bible*.¹¹ However, this view was not accepted for long because (a) the term “the day of Christ” is one of approximately twenty variant expressions in the New Testament for “the day of the Lord,” and because (b) the term “the day of the Lord” is related to the rapture in certain key New Testament texts, notably, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:4 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2.¹² In 1958 J. Dwight Pentecost focused on the “unexpected” commencement of the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5, relating it to the unexpected event of the rapture. He concluded, “The day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God’s dealing with Israel after the rapture at the beginning of the tribulational period and extending through the second advent and the millennial age unto the creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millennium.”¹³

In 1968 Clarence Mason wrote an article called “The Day of Our Lord Jesus Christ” that effectively ended the dispute among the followers of Scofield and Chafer.¹⁴ He argued that the many “day” expressions in the New Testament, including “the day of Christ,” refer to the same extended event and could be seen in combined form in 1 Corinthians 1:7–8: “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus this is a period that “extends from the translation of the church to the creation of the new heavens and new earth, after the close of the millennial age, and includes the period of the tribulation, the whole millennium, and the judgments following the millennium.”¹⁵

This view that the day of the Lord extends from the rapture to the re-creation, what might be called the *long* day of the Lord, came to dominate dispensational premillennial thinking. It was adopted in the revised *Scofield Reference Bible*, on whose editorial

¹¹ Ibid., 1212 n. 2.

¹² Some manuscripts render “the day of the Lord” as “the day of Christ” in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. The King James Version has the latter reading. However, most textual scholars today agree that the former is preferred, and it has been adopted by more recent translations.

¹³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 230–31.

¹⁴ Clarence E. Mason Jr., “The Day of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (July–September 1968): 352–58.

¹⁵ Ibid., 357.

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committee Clarence Mason sat, and it appeared in subsequent publications, such as *Major Bible Prophecies*, by John F. Walvoord.¹⁶

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Since the early twentieth century, critical study of the day of the Lord has been guided by a history-of-traditions approach. The primary question pursued by critical scholars concerned the origin of the phrase יום יהוה. Early suggestions of an ancient Near Eastern background by Hermann Gunkel, Hugo Gressmann, and others was ruled out by failure to find any verbal parallels in Babylonian, Phoenecian, Canaanite, or other alleged sources.¹⁷ The day of the Lord is unique to Israelite prophecy. Suggested preprophetic Israelite origins have included Mowinkel's hypothetical Yahweh-enthronement festival in the cult of Israel, a view that has mostly fallen out of favor today.¹⁸ Von Rad claimed that the day of the Lord originated in Israel's holy war tradition.¹⁹ His study presented a better array of textual considerations, and there is no doubt that many of the classic day of the Lord texts speak of military conflict and the destructive consequences of war. However, von Rad's reading of the texts was challenged by Meir Weiss, who believed a simpler motif lay embedded therein and reappeared in a number of other texts ignored by von Rad, such as Amos 5:18, which is believed to be the earliest textual record of the day of the Lord. "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met

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¹⁶ *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 929 n. 1, and 1372–73 n. 5; and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 271.

This "long view" was challenged by Robert Gundry in *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 89–99. Gundry's view was similar to the earlier Scofield view, which said the day of the Lord will begin at the end of the tribulation. A similar position on the day of the Lord has been presented by Richard Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 231–46. More recently Marvin Rosenthal proposed that the day of the Lord will begin after the midpoint of the Tribulation (*The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 115–34).

This series of lectures will argue for the legitimacy of the "long view" with respect to the tribulation period (but will not address the relationship of the millennium to the day of the Lord).

¹⁷ See Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895); and Hugo Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905). For an overview of interpretations of the day of the Lord see Ladislav Černý, *The Day of the Lord and Some Recent Problems* (Prague: Nakladem Filosofické Fakulty University Karlovy, 1948), 27–52. See also Kevin Cathcart, "The Day of Yahweh," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:84–85.

¹⁸ Sigmund Mowinkel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 132–33. A defense of Mowinkel's view is given in John Gray, "The Day of Yahweh: A Study in Cultic Experience and Eschatological Prospect," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 39 (1974): 5–37.

¹⁹ Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97–108.

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him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18–20).

Rather than war, with its associated imagery, Weiss argued that the simpler description of darkness in this early text pointed to a simpler motif—the phenomenon of theophany.²⁰ The day of the Lord was a day of Yahweh's appearing, similar to Mowinkel's suggested epiphany in the enthronement festival but without the associated hypothetical cultic context. According to Weiss, theophany constituted the key idea in the day of the Lord, as presented in a number of contexts that include but are not limited to holy war.

These and other historical-critical studies of the day of the Lord have been helpful in giving attention to the type and pattern of the day of the Lord. However, their weakness has been that this attention has been directed primarily to a supposed underlying preprophetic original type behind the texts rather than the literary pattern of the day of the Lord in the prophetic texts themselves. The exception, of course, was when the literary textual pattern was thought to be a true witness to the underlying archetype. Consequently von Rad's and Weiss's studies of features of the day of the Lord in selected texts do provide some help to one who is interested in the day of the Lord theme in biblical texts. Furthermore historical-critical studies gave attention to the historical settings of many day of the Lord texts, and this is important for understanding the typological relationship of history and eschatology on this theme and within Scripture generally.

The weakness of the historical-critical approach lies in its fragmentation of the biblical text. The day of the Lord, while admittedly important, is merely an occasional prophetic theme, mixed in with a collection of themes. Also by emphasizing exclusively a diachronic approach historical-critical studies typically miss the role the day of the Lord plays in larger literary contexts. Its features are not utterly unique nor are they in literary isolation, but they are interwoven into the broader literary structure contributing to a canonical biblical eschatology.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN INTERTEXTUAL STUDIES

A different approach to study of the day of the Lord rises out of literary concerns for the text of Scripture in its canonical form. Attention to this matter has especially focused on the Book of the Twelve, the Minor Prophets, as a literary unit. Ancient Hebrew canonical lists counted the twelve as a single book, even though it is also clear that they were

²⁰ Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord'—Reconsidered," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966): 29–63.

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authored separately at different times. However, the ancient conjoining of these works as a literary unit is an invitation to read them in that way. And the current interest in biblical studies for canonical interpretation and intertextuality creates the conditions for doing precisely that. A number of works have explored the interconnections of the Book of the Twelve. Particularly important are the works of Paul House, R. J. Coggins, and especially James Nogalski.²¹ Nogalski and others have noted the various devices of intertextual unity in the Twelve. For example, “The book of the twelve exhibits at least five different types of intertextuality: quotations, allusions, catchwords, motifs, and framing devices. Some of these devices overlap with one another, and in a very real sense some are more objective than others. Nevertheless, each type of intertextuality offers an evaluatable perspective for the reading of the 12 as a canon.”²²

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Of concern in this present series is the contribution this approach makes to the interpretation of the day of the Lord as a canonical theme. For the day of the Lord is viewed in these studies as a major unifying theme in the Minor Prophets.²³

While not all the interesting results of reading the day of the Lord this way in the Book of the Twelve can be noted here, certain features can be observed.

First, the day of the Lord appears as a complex theme throughout the Minor Prophets. Joel is wholly taken up with the theme (יום יהוה) appears five times in Joel: 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4 [Eng. 2:31]; 4:14 [Eng. 3:14]), and he presented it in at least two senses—judgment on

²¹ Paul House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement (Sheffield: Almond, 1990); R. J. Coggins, “The Minor Prophets—One Book or Twelve?” in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*, ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57–68; James W. Watts and Paul R. House, eds., *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996); James D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); idem, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); idem, “Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for a Theological Reading,” *Interpretation* 61 (2007): 125–36; and James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Scholars, 2000).

²² James D. Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” in *Forming Prophetic Literature*, 103.

²³ Rolff Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity,” in *Seminar Papers 1997* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 420–32; idem, “Alas for the Day! The ‘Day of the Lord’ in the Book of the Twelve,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 186–97; James D. Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1999* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 617–42; also printed in idem, *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 192–213; and Paul R. House, “Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, 258–84.

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Judah and Jerusalem and judgment on the nations. The first sense could itself be twofold, a locust plague and a military invasion. Rendtorff sees Joel 2:28–32 as yet another form of the day of the Lord, which he labels as eschatological, thereby giving three different days of the Lord in Joel.²⁴ Since Joel is second in the canonical order of the Book of the Twelve (after Hosea and before Amos), this complex day of the Lord governs the reading of the Twelve. The Book of the Twelve, then, develops aspects of Joel’s complex structure.²⁵

Reading the Twelve canonically leads to a different view of the day of the Lord in Amos, for unlike the imagined audience of historical critical reconstruction, the reader of the Twelve comes to Amos informed that the day of the Lord threatens both Yahweh’s people and the nations. Amos’s words would then be seen as a reminder rather than as a shocking new revelation.²⁶

Second, the interconnections of the day of the Lord type or pattern to other prophetic oracles of judgment become clear. This reinforces the connection to other “day” terminology, but it also enables one to see the pattern even in texts where “day” is scarcely mentioned or not mentioned at all.²⁷ This is seen in the book of Amos, for although the day of the Lord is mentioned by name in 5:18, the book begins with a clause that is in Joel’s prophecy of the day of the Lord against the nations: “The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem” (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2).

Beginning his prophecy with these words, Amos then followed with oracles of judgment against the nations, although that judgment did not take place in the valley of Jehoshaphat as was the case with Joel’s concluding day of the Lord prophecy (Joel 3:14). Amos’s oracles of judgment against the nations (Amos 1:3–2:3) conclude with

²⁴ Rendtorff, “Alas for the Day!” 191; and idem, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological ‘Unity,’ ” 423–25.

²⁵ Rendtorff, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological ‘Unity,’ ” 423–25; and Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” 203.

²⁶ Rendtorff, “Alas for the Day!” 187; and idem, “How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological ‘Unity,’ ” 422. For a critique of this reading of Amos see John Barton, “The Day of Yahweh in the Minor Prophets,” in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart*, ed. Carwel McCarthy and John F. Healey (London: Clark, 2004), 68–79. Nevertheless Barton acknowledges that the traditional critical view of Amos renders the prophet’s words as idiosyncratic within the biblical canon (*ibid.*, 74).

²⁷ An expansion of textual bases beyond the strict occurrence of the term is argued for by A. Joseph Everson, “The Days of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 329–37. An example of the contrary view can be seen in Yair Hoffman, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in Prophetic Literature,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1981): 37–50. Nogalski argues for an expanded textual base on the grounds of intertextual links in the Twelve (“The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” 212–13).

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pronouncements against Judah and Israel (2:4–3:15). These eight oracles end with focus “on the day [the Lord punishes] Israel for his transgressions” (3:14).

Building off the literary canonical approach exemplified by studies in the Book of the Twelve the following is an overview of the various patterns and types of the day of the Lord in the Old Testament. These patterns and types are important for addressing the question of the meaning of the day of the Lord in the New Testament. Together, the study of both Old and New Testament patterns will be important for building a theological understanding of the day of the Lord as it functions in eschatology and within Christian theological thought.

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DAY OF THE LORD TEXTS

The phrase יום יהוה occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament, thirteen of which are found in the Book of the Twelve.²⁸ These fifteen occurrences appear in ten different oracles. However, as already noted, the day of the Lord is signaled by variants of the phrase such as “the day of the wrath of Yahweh,” “on that day,” “Yahweh (of hosts) has a day,” or “the day.” Beyond that are passages in which יום (“day”) is not used, but the verses are linked intertextually to explicit day of the Lord texts.

If one includes only passages in which some variant of יום occurs, the following may be noted for the purposes of this article: Isaiah 2:6–22; 13:1–22; 22:1–25; 24:1–23; 34:1–17; Jeremiah 25:30–38; 46:1–12; Ezekiel 7:1–27; 38:1–39:29; Joel 1:1–20; 2:1–11, 28–32; 3:1–21; Amos 5:16–27; Obadiah 1–21; Nahum 1:1–15; Habakkuk 3:1–16; Zephaniah 1:1–18; 2:1–15; 3:8–13; Zechariah 12:1–9; 14:1–15; and Malachi 3:1–5; 4:1–3.

From these texts the following patterns typical of the day of the Lord can be seen.

PATTERNS OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

TYPE 1: THE DAY OF THE LORD IN SIMPLE DESCRIPTION

The day of the Lord is presented with simple descriptors and in descriptions that do not present a sequential pattern.

- “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near, as destruction from the Almighty it will come” (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15).
- “[The day of the Lord is] darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and

²⁸ Nogalski, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” 193–96.

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a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18–20).

- "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph. 1:15).
- "The day of the wrath of the Lord" (Zeph. 1:18).
- "Who can endure the day of his coming?... he will purify ... and refine" (Mal. 3:2–3).
- "The day is coming, burning like an oven" (Mal. 4:1).

TYPE 2: THE DAY OF THE LORD AS AN ABBREVIATED PATTERN²⁹

In these prophecies a sequenced event can be seen, but the pattern is briefly stated. In comparison with those in type 3, these can be called abbreviated patterns.

The splendor of the Lord rises up;
terror comes on people;
they withdraw in humility into rocks and caves (Isa. 2:6–22).

The sword of the Lord is raised;
the sword falls;
there is slaughter (Isa. 34:1–17).

A nation comes up;
it lays waste;
there is lament and mourning (Joel 1:1–20).

The Lord comes;
the earth and seas are trodden by Him;
His wrath is poured out (Nah. 1:1–15).

God comes in splendor;
He slaughters the invaders (Hab. 3:1–16).

²⁹ In the following sections (types 2–8) the wording does not directly quote the verses; the clauses and phrases summarize the contents of those verses.

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TYPE 3: THE DAY OF THE LORD AS AN EXTENDED EVENT OF INVASION AND BATTLE

In these passages the day of the Lord is drawn out in a full literary description. The passages are Isaiah 13:1–22; Joel 2:1–11; Ezekiel 7:1–27; Nahum 2:1–3:19.³⁰

- Summons of the invader;
- mobilization, gathering of the army;
- advance of the army;
- destruction of the land, people, and cities on the way;
- terror, fear, panic of the intended victim;
- clouds, gloom, thick darkness;
- siege of the city;
- battle;
- slaughter, plunder;
- destruction of the city;
- desolation.

TYPE 4: THE DAY OF THE LORD AS EXTENDED WORLD EVENTS

While type 3 passages present an attack on one city or nation, the following passages portray a worldwide conflict.

- Wrath on all nations including Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:1–18).
- Wrath on all nations as a warning to Jerusalem (Zeph. 2:1–15).
- Wrath on all nations, including Jerusalem, to purge and purify (Zeph. 3:8–13).

TYPE 5: AGGREGATE DAYS OF THE LORD

Joel presents the phenomena of multiple “days of the Lord.” The days presented in Joel 1–2 focus on Israel and Jerusalem. Joel 3 speaks of judgment on the nations.

- First day of the Lord:
An army advances against the land, against Jerusalem, no escape [repentance?] removal of invader, peace (Joel 1:1–20; 2:1–11).
- Intervening day of the Lord:

³⁰ Nahum 2–3 develops the abbreviated pattern of the day of the Lord that is in Nahum 1.

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Signs and wonders in heaven and earth; some delivered in Zion (Joel 2:28–32).

- Second day of the Lord:
Nations gathered by Yahweh for judgment;
Yahweh judges the nations;
Yahweh, a refuge for His people (Joel 3:1–21; cf. Hab. 3:1–16).³¹

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TYPE 6: THE TWOFOLD DAY OF THE LORD, EXTENDED EVENT

A Day Coming for the Lord (Zech. 14:1–15)

- Movement 1: Nations gathered by the Lord against Jerusalem; city taken, plundered, ravished, some exiled
- Movement 2: Yahweh “goes out” and fights against the nations
Yahweh comes with His holy ones
Yahweh stands on the Mount of Olives
Earthquake
Yahweh strikes the armies gathered against Jerusalem
Yahweh reigns as King

TYPE 7: THE TWOFOLD DAY OF THE LORD, SIMPLE DESCRIPTION

Malachi offers a twofold pattern that is similar to the one in Zechariah. However, here each half is presented in simple description rather than as a narrated event sequence.

- *The Great and Awesome Day of the Lord* (Mal. 3:1–5; 4:1–3)
A refiner’s fire, refining and purifying Levi,
A burning oven, consuming the arrogant.

TYPE 8: THE DAY OF THE LORD WITH DELAYED PUNISHMENT

This type has the unique feature of imprisonment and punishment after the fulfillment of typical features in the day of the Lord.

Desolation of the land, destruction of the city;
the earth broken up;
prisoners imprisoned in a pit;

³¹ Habakkuk 3:1–16 presents a day of the Lord judgment on Babylon *after* Babylon has been an instrument of judgment on Judah, as prophesied in Habakkuk 1–2. However, explicit day of the Lord imagery is used only in Habakkuk 3.

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punishment after many days (Isa. 24:1–23).

These eight patterns show that the day of the Lord can be referenced in both simple and complex descriptions. Furthermore, these patterns are related so that simple descriptions often appear together with extended narrations. These various patterns are interrelated in two primary ways. The first is through historical typology. The list below shows days of the Lord that can be identified historically and days of the Lord that appear to be eschatological predictions from the standpoint of the prophet.

HISTORICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL DAYS OF THE LORD

<i>Historical Days of the Lord</i>	
Israel (722 BC)	Amos 5:16–27
Nineveh, Assyria	Nah. 1:1–15; Zeph. 2:1–15
Egypt	Jer. 46:1–12
Judah, Jerusalem (586 BC)	Isa. 22:1–25; Lam. 3:21–22; Ezek. 7:1–27 [Joel 1:1–2:32?]; Zeph. 1:1–18; 3:1–7 (cf. Amos 2:4–5)
Edom	Isa. 34:1–17; Obad. 1–21
Babylon	Isa. 13:1–22; Hab. 3:1–16; Jer. 25:30–38
<i>Eschatological Days of the Lord</i>	
Judah, Jerusalem	[Joel 1:1–2:32?]; Zeph. 3:8–13; Zech. 14:1–15
All nations, all flesh	Joel 3:1–21; Zeph. 1:2–3; Isa. 2:6–22; 13:1–22; 17–18; 3:8–13; Zech. 12:1–9; 14:1–15; Obad. 15–18; Ezek. 38:1–39:29
All the wicked	Mal. 4:1–3
Purification of Israel	Zeph. 3:8–13; Mal. 3:1–5 (Isa. 1:21–31)

In addition to this historical typological interrelationship, the various patterns of the day of the Lord share common imagery and motifs. Below is a list of a number of prominent images. One can see from the references the frequency of the descriptions. In some cases only one or two texts are given, but the image is included because it reappears in the New Testament.

DAY OF THE LORD IMAGERY

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Near	Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 7:7; 30:3; Joel 1:15; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7
Darkness and gloom Clouds and thick darkness	Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:5; 3:15
Shaking, trembling, quaking of heaven, earth, mountains, hills	Isa. 13:13; 24:1–23; Joel 2:1, 10; 3:16 (cf. Hag. 2:6–7; 2:21)
Signs and wonders in heaven and earth; sun turned dark and moon to blood	Joel 2:30–31
Wrath, fierce anger	Isa. 13:9, 13; 34:2; Ezek. 7:8, 14, 19; Nah. 1:2, 6; Zeph. 1:5, 18; 2:1–3; 3:8
Fire	Joel 1:19–20; 2:3, 5 (cf. Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5); Obad. 18; Nah. 1:5–6; Zeph. 1:18; 2:2; 3:8; Zech. 12:6; Mal. 3:2–3; 4:1–2
Terror, fear, dismay, panic	Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; 13:6–8; Ezek. 7:5, 17, 25–27; Joel 2:1, 6, 10; Nah. 2:10
Labor pains	Isa. 13:7 (cf. Mic. 4:10)
Cup of judgment	(Cf. Isa. 51:21–23); Jer. 25:15–28; Obad. 16 (cf. Hab. 2:16)
Winepress	Joel 3:13
Locusts	Joel 1:1–20; Nah. 3:15–16
Famine	Ezek. 7:15; Joel 1:1–20
An end	Ezek. 7:2–3, 6, 24; Amos 8:1; Nah. 1:8, 9; Zeph. 1:18;

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Desolation	Isa. 13:19–22; Joel 2:3 (cf. 1:2–12; 16–20); Nah. 2:10; Zeph. 1:1–18; 2:1–15
A sacrifice	Isa. 34:1–17; Zeph. 1:7–8
Gathering the nations for judgment (a massive foe)	Isa. 13:4; 34:1–2; Jer. 25:30–31; Ezek. 38:1–39:29; Joel 1:6; 2:2; 3:2, 14; 4:2, 14 (cf. Mic. 4:11–12); Obad. 15; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 12:1–9; 14:1–3
Call to repentance	Joel 2:12–17; Zeph. 2:1–3 (Zech. 12:10–14); Mal. 4:5–6
Salvation of some	Joel 2:32; 3:16; Obad. 17; Nah. 1:7; Hab. 3:2; Zeph. 2:3; 3:12–13; Mal. 3:4
Explicit theophany	Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; Hab. 3:1–16; Zech. 14:1–15; Mal. 3:1–5
Implicit theophany	Almost all texts, esp. Isa. 13:1–22; Joel 2:1–11; 3:1–21; Amos 1:2; Zeph. 3:8

By means of common motifs, shared imagery, and historical typology, the day of the Lord—whether conceptualized simply, holistically, as a catastrophic judgment event, or visualized in complex narrative fashion as unfolding disaster—emerges as a primary theme in prophetic Scripture. Most importantly, it is taken up in the New Testament together with the tribulational pattern revealed in Daniel to become the setting for the future return of Jesus. This is discussed in the second lecture in this series.³²

³² Blasing, C. A. (2012). “The Day of the Lord: Theme and Pattern in Biblical Theology.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 169(673–676), 3–19.