

## ***The Lynchpin of Eschatology***

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Obfuscation rules the day as we navigate the near countless interpretations of the End Times. From high level chronology to symbolic meanings, there seems no end to the positions held in this field of study. Consequently, some Christians resign themselves to the conclusion we can't really know what these portions of the Bible mean.

This is a shame. These Christians miss out on a significant part of what God revealed to us about Himself and His plan for creation.

Often a person starts with one verse or another as a proof text for his or her preferred position and weighs that verse with particular importance, sometimes to the neglect of other passages in scripture which are needed for a clear, comprehensive view.

All scripture must be harmonized for truth to be realized: but where to begin? This question is not so straightforward on the topic of Eschatology. At least 20 books in the Bible contain prophecies related to the End Times and it's not clearly apparent where to begin.

There is, I believe, a good starting point - a foundational concept to build on - a "lynchpin", if you will, when studying eschatology.

I propose we begin study of the End Times with a concrete understanding of The Day of the Lord. When we understand this seminal End Times event as a focal point of essential importance, it provides a framework to make sense of many other End Times events.

If you're unfamiliar with this concept, then the obvious question is "Why this?". Why not start with the 70 Weeks of Daniel prophecy or a prophecy about Jesus returning?

I believe we can summarize the rationale to 3 key points:

- 1) The Primacy of the Day of the Lord Prophecies
- 2) The Frequency of the Day of the Lord Prophecies
- 3) The Magnitude of the Day of the Lord Prophecies

First, let's quickly define our terms. What is this "Day of the Lord" which I argue should form the lynchpin of eschatological study?

As a working definition for our purposes, The Day of the Lord is a specific, prophesied event where God will begin his judgement on the world and pour out His wrath on the wicked. This is when the eschatological judgement of God begins.

With that foundation, let's examine the 3 points.

## **Point 1: The Primacy of the Day of the Lord Prophecies**

When I speak of the primacy of the Day of the Lord in scripture, I don't mean it's the first prophecy. The Protoevangelion of Genesis 3 first gives us insight into God's plan to restore humanity.

However, when it comes to the writings of the prophets regarding Eschatology, the Day of the Lord appears very early. As a general interpretive principle, newer revelation should be understood in light of what was previously revealed.

Because the Day of the Lord appears in scripture before scripture tells us of most other End Times events, we should start with the Day of the Lord as a foundational element to our understanding of the End Times. Consider this passage from Joel:

*“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”*

- **Joel 2:30-31 ESV**

Joel chapters 1 and 2 give us far more detail about the Day of the Lord than the short excerpt above, but I want to draw two points from this passage.

The first point is that Joel is an early writing of the Prophets. It's difficult to find a consensus among scholars when any book of the Bible was written, but it's widely agreed that Joel was written very early, with some scholars placing Joel as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. Other early prophetic writings about the Day of the Lord are found in Obadiah, Amos, Zephaniah, and Isaiah.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that Joel and the other books mentioned above were written prior to, for instance, Daniel, which is where we receive the 70 Weeks prophecy (and the concept of “The Tribulation”, though I dislike the use of that term) and certainly before any New Testament prophecies about Jesus' Second Coming. Though, as we'll see, there is a connection between Jesus returning and the Day of the Lord.

If we were to list the major events of the eschatological timeline, such as the 70<sup>th</sup> Week / Tribulation, Abomination of Desolation, Rapture, Great Tribulation, or any others, we will find that this prophecy of the Day of the Lord in Joel and other passages predates the prophecies of these other End Times events. As such, we must hold it as a firmly established, revealed truth before we approach the prophecies about these other events.

## **Point 2: The Frequency of the Day of the Lord Prophecies**

All scripture is God-breathed. Therefore, everything in scripture is important. When we see something repeated in Bible more than once, we should really pay attention. When it is repeated many times... I'm sure you get the idea.

I'm not arguing that we should somehow rank order the importance of doctrines based on the frequency it's articulated in the Bible. However, when God chooses to convey something multiple times, particularly by multiple authors over such a long span of time, we should really pay attention.

Consider the following as a non-comprehensive list of Day of the Lord references:

Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:14  
Isaiah 2:12, 13:6  
Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3  
Amos 5:18  
Obadiah 15  
Zephaniah 1:7  
Zechariah 14:1  
Malachi 4:5  
Matthew 24:29

Mark 13:24  
Luke 21:25  
Acts 2:20  
1 Corinthians 5:5  
2 Corinthians 1:14  
1 Thessalonians 5:2  
2 Thessalonians 2:2  
2 Peter 3:10  
Revelation 6:12-17

From this list we see The Day of the Lord appear in 18 different books by more than a dozen biblical authors spanning nearly 1,000 years. Few doctrines in scripture can boast such a resume, and fewer still related to eschatology.

### **Point 3: The Magnitude of the Day of the Lord Prophecies**

In no uncertain terms, the biblical authors make it clear that the Day of the Lord is a unique event of singular importance. Let's examine a few passages regarding this great and terrible Day.

*"Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!"*

- **Joel 2:1(b)-2(a) ESV**

*"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,"*

- **Amos 5:18 ESV**

*"Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore, all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt.*

*They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them;*

*they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame."*

- **Isaiah 13:6-8 ESV**

*"That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood."*

- **Jeremiah 46:10 ESV**

*“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”*

- **1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 ESV**

*“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”*

- **2 Peter 3:10 ESV**

These passages are not speaking of an inconsequential event. This is a day where God directly steps into human history to enact judgement on all those who are enemies of God. This is the Day where God’s wrath truly begins.

We see this Day described with darkness, vengeance, blood, and destruction. God directly acts upon the world so that all men will know who He is. Isaiah says that “. . . every man’s heart will melt”. There will be no ambiguity, no doubt, no mistake about who God is and what He is doing on the Day of the Lord.

This is a Day that God declares with His own name. Most English translations render the Old Testament name of God (YHWH or Yahweh) as The LORD. Because of this, it’s easy to forget that the name God gave to His people, Yahweh, is what is used thousands of times in the Old Testament, including in these passages.

Consider one of the earlier passages in the Legacy Standard Bible translation, which renders the name of God in English as Yahweh, instead of The LORD.

*“Woe, you who are longing for the day of Yahweh,  
For what purpose will the day of Yahweh be to you? It will be darkness and not light;”*

- **Amos 5:18 LSB**

My purpose in this is to convey that this is a Day which God has attached His own name to. No other name will matter on that Day. No other name will be exalted. This is a Day which will belong to Him alone.

In short, the passages regarding the Day of the Lord convey that it is an event of massive importance. It’s hard to overstate the significance the Day of the Lord. The biblical authors knew this full well and drove the point home to us with repetition and powerful language.

I believe this is something the modern church has largely neglected to its detriment. If we were to poll a sampling of congregants in any given church, I doubt many could articulate an explanation of the Day of the Lord.

If these passages do not impress upon us the importance of the Day of the Lord, then we are simply not paying attention to our Bibles. Between the primacy, frequency, and magnitude of the prophecies of the Day of the Lord, we should appropriately hold it as a lynchpin event in our understanding of Eschatology. Once we do that, we can begin to make sense of other End Times events, particularly in certain chronological contexts.

### **The Application**

How does this help us? Consider what we are told in Joel about the Day of the Lord. Before the Day of the Lord, there will be signs in the heavens, particularly of the sun and moon.

*“The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”*

- **Joel 2:31 ESV**

This is reiterated by Peter in Acts Chapter 2 when he references this prophecy in Joel.

*“And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.”*

- **Acts 2:19-20 ESV**

Let's examine one more passage from the Old Testament that speaks of these signs in the heavens in conjunction with the Day of the Lord.

*“Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.”*

- **Isaiah 13:9-10 ESV**

The Bible firmly establishes that God's judgment is poured out at the Day of the Lord. Of particular importance, however, is that there are signs in the heavens which act as a forerunner to the Day of the Lord. Note that Joel says the sun will be darkened and the moon as blood **before** the Day of the Lord. These are specific signs indicating the arrival of the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah adds the detail that the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light. This is, of course, very consistent with all of the passages we examined about the Day of the Lord being a day of darkness on the earth.

For shorthand, I'll refer to the “Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars” as these forerunner signs of the sun being darkened, the moon turning red as blood (or not shed its light), and the stars and their constellations not giving their light.

Why are the Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars so important and why spend time connecting them to the Day of the Lord? Perhaps you're asking this valid question.

The reason is that we see these Signs other places in scripture. So, when we see them, we know we're talking about the Day of the Lord, as well. Even if that specific term, Day of the Lord, is not used in a particular verse. In these passages, we're told more details about End Times events, so it helps us connect a chronology of those events in relation to the Day of the Lord.

The first, and most important, passage to examine in this light is Jesus' account of the End Times, often termed the Olivet Discourse. Matthew Chapter 24 and 25 gives us the most detailed accounting of the Olivet Discourse.

I encourage you to take the time to read the full account in Matthew if you're not familiar, but here is a short overview.

A few of Jesus' disciples ask Him, "What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (v.3). Jesus warns them of false Christs, wars, and famines but tells them not to be alarmed. Then Jesus references a couple of important End Times events that will aid us in our chronology related to the Day of the Lord.

Jesus tells his followers, "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, . . ." (v.15).

This is another standout End Times event first given to us in the Book of Daniel. Among those of us who affirm a future, final 7 year period, there is near universal agreement that the Abomination of Desolation occurs at the midpoint of that final 7 year period. (See Daniel 9:27).

So, in Jesus' account of the end, we have here in Matt. 24:15 a chronological marker. We're at the midpoint. What does Jesus say happens next?

Jesus warns his followers to flee, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." (v.21-22).

This is the Great Tribulation. Again, nearly universal agreement (among futurists) that this takes place, starting at the midpoint, during the second half of that final 7 weeks.

An important point that is often glossed over is that those days of great tribulation will be cut short for the sake of the elect. I want you to pay close attention to the next event that takes place, when the great tribulation is cut short.

Verse 29 (ESV): “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

Once again, we see the Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars! The forerunner signs of the Day of the Lord. In terms of chronology, we now have:

Abomination of Desolation (midpoint of the 7 years)  
Great Tribulation (second half of the 7 years, but cut short)  
Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars / Day of the Lord

Jesus goes on to give us more information about this event; about the Day of the Lord!

In verse 30 and 31 (ESV), He says, “*Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*”

What a significant, additional detail about the Day of the Lord! This is the answer to His disciples’ question, “What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” The Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, which are the signs of the Day of the Lord, are also the signs of Jesus returning and gathering His elect.

It is for this reason that Paul also uses the term “Day of Christ” in his letters. Paul is speaking of the same event.

Christ returns at the Day of the Lord and gathers his elect to Himself before God pours out His wrath on the wicked world. This plays out in accordance with Paul’s message letter to the church at Thessalonica.

*“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”*

- **1 Thessalonians 5:9 ESV**

Jesus returns to rescue His church immediately before God pours out His wrath during the Day of the Lord.

A potential objection is that the term Day of the Lord is not used in Jesus’ account in the Olivet Discourse. The simple answer is that Jesus didn’t need to use the term.

The disciples were faithful Jewish men who knew the Old Testament Scriptures intimately. When Jesus said, “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken”, the disciples unambiguously knew He was referring to the Day of the Lord.

Now that we've seen Jesus connects His return with the Day of the Lord, it helps us have a fuller view of these passages that speak of the Day of the Lord and the Signs.

Consider one more from the Book of Revelation:

*"When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and **the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth** as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave<sup>[d]</sup> and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for **the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?**"*"

- **Revelation 6:12-17 ESV** (emphasis mine)

No doubt you see the Signs of the Sun, Moon, and Stars and the Wrath of God beginning. The opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> Seal in Revelation also marks the arrival of the Day of the Lord (and the return of Christ, as we just saw!)

A parallel study of Revelation Chapter 6 and the Olivet Discourse is far beyond the scope of this article, but I encourage you to take the time to read Matthew 24 and then Revelation 6 and note the parallels. Understanding this parallel, which is aided by the lynchpin event of the Day of the Lord chronicled in both passages, helps us form a cohesive narrative of End Times events.

## **The Conclusion**

The Day of the Lord is the most important day in humanity's future. It is the day when the Almighty, Holy God says, "Enough". He will step into his creation, rescue those who belong to Him, and enact judgment and wrath upon the wicked who have rejected and rebelled against Him.

This extraordinary day which belongs to God alone cannot be over emphasized.

The prophets, the apostles, and Son of God Himself warned of us this Day. Any person who does not have a clear understanding of this Day will fail to see the big picture of the End Times clearly.

Therefore, if this Day is as important as I've attempted to convey, then it is, indeed, a lynchpin in our understanding of God's future plan for His creation.