

**Wenstrom Bible Ministries**  
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**Zephaniah: Introduction-Day of the Lord Theme**

**Lesson # 4**

One of the major lines of prophecy running throughout the Old Testament and continuing through the New Testament is the prophetic truth related to the “Day of the Lord.”

It is a critical phrase in understanding God’s revelation regarding the future of planet earth, the city of Jerusalem, the nation of Israel as well as the Gentiles.

The writers of the New Testament use this phrase based on their understanding of the Old Testament prophets.

This phrase was used by the prophets of Israel in the Old Testament when they were speaking of both near historical events as well as future eschatological events.

The New Testament writers understood this and applied the phrase to both the judgment which will terminate the tribulation period of Daniel’s Seventieth week as well as the judgment which will bring the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

The term “Day of the Lord” occurs in the following passages: Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obadiah 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14 (twice); Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10.

The phrases “that day” or “the day” or “the great day” also refer to the day of the Lord and appear more than 75 times in the Old Testament.

The term “Day of the Lord” and the phrases “that day” or “the day” or the “great day” are used with reference to Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Isaiah 13:5-6; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 29, 31; 38:10-19; 39:11, 22; Obadiah 14-15; Zephaniah 1:14, 18; 2:2-3; Zechariah 12:3-4, 6, 8-9; Malachi 4:5), the Second Advent of Christ (Zechariah 12:11; 14:4, 6, 8), millennium (Ezekiel 45:22; 48:35; Joel 3:18;

Zechariah 14:9; Zephaniah 3:11), and the creation of the new heavens and earth (2 Peter 2:10).

Now, if you notice that there are only four passages in the New Testament in which “the day of the Lord” appears (Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) but this phrase is used often by the writers of the Old Testament.

Thus, Paul and Peter’s understanding of the day of the Lord was based upon their understanding of this use of the phrase in the Old Testament.

Now a survey of the use of the phrase “the day of the Lord” in both the Old and New Testaments reveal that it is used with reference to the contemporary history of the writer (cf. Is. 13:6; Joel 1:15).

However, it is also used in relation to the future such as Daniel’s Seventieth Week (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2) and the creation of the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10).

When the writer uses the phrase with regards to God’s judgments, it is often accompanied by a pronouncement of God’s blessing (cf. Zech. 14:1-21).

This phrase “the day of the Lord” is used of a period of time when God will judge nations (Obad. 15; Zeph 2) while at other times it is used with regards to God judging the nation of Israel (Joel 1:15) or Jerusalem (Zeph. 3:1-12).

Interestingly, often this judgment of Israel and Jerusalem is followed by a pronouncement of the restoration of Israel with the Messiah dwelling in her midst as her king (Zeph. 3:14-20).

The phrase “day of the Lord” occurs nineteen times in the Old Testament and occurs only in six minor and two major prophets.

It is found in Obadiah 15 where it is used of God’s judgment of Edom which had a near fulfillment through Nebuchadnezzar which is indicated by the statements in Obadiah 1-14 which address only Edom.

However, this phrase also pointed to Obadiah 15 being fulfilled in the far distant future and the establishment of Christ’s millennial kingdom which is indicated by Obadiah 15-21.

The phrase “day of the Lord” occurs five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1; 2:11, 31; 3:14).

Joel's prophecy can be described as having a near eschatological fulfillment with the locust plague taking place in Joel's day but it also can be described as having a far view in that it will be fulfilled during the tribulation period of Daniel's Seventieth Week and Jesus Christ's subsequent millennial reign.

The phrase "the day of the Lord" also appears twice in the book of Amos (5:18, 20).

The prophecy of Amos is directed to the historical situation in his day which is indicated by the fact that he wrote to the ten northern tribes in 7:10 and to King Jeroboam predicting his future exile to Assyria in 5:27, 6:14, 7:19 and 17.

So Amos only uses the phrase "the day of the Lord" in a near sense meaning that his use of the phrase is only contained in a prophecy which was exclusive to the historical situation in his day.

The phrase "the day of the Lord" occurs twice in Isaiah (13:6, 9) but the first reference to "the day of the Lord" appears in Isaiah 2:12.

In Isaiah chapter 13 is a prophecy regarding Babylon and thus the reference to "the day of the Lord" in Isaiah 13 speaks of a near eschatological fulfillment which was fulfilled by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (605-586 B.C.).

But it does appear that this prophecy speaks of far eschatological fulfillment as indicated by Isaiah 13:9-16 which describes even the stars of the stellar universe being affected by God's judgment of the world for its evil.

The description of God's judgment in these verses echoes Matthew 24:29, Revelation 6:12-13 and Joel 2:31 which speak God's judgment of the world during the tribulation portion of the Daniel's Seventieth Week.

"The day of the Lord" is found in Ezekiel twice (13:5; 30:3).

In Ezekiel 13, the prophet spoke against false prophets (1-16) and prophetesses (17-23) and is a reference to the time from the beginning of Judah's deportation in 605 B.C. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and thus Ezekiel like Amos is speaking of only a near reference to the day of the Lord in his day.

In Ezekiel 30, the prophet refers to “the day of the Lord” in the context of the destruction of Egypt (29:19-20) which was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt.

Zechariah makes a reference to the day of the Lord in chapter 14 of this book which deals entirely with the far eschatological fulfillment rather than a near one since the Assyrian and Babylonian judgments from God were already history.

Zechariah 14:1-2 is a prophecy regarding the last three and a half years of Daniel’s Seventieth Week.

Zechariah 14:3-8 is a prophecy regarding the Second Advent of Jesus Christ which ends Daniel’s Seventieth Week while Zechariah 14:9-21 is a prophecy regarding the subsequent millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

The day of the Lord is found in Malachi 4:5 which also will have a far eschatological fulfillment during the tribulation period.

Lastly, “the day of the Lord” appears in the book of Zephaniah (1:7, 14).

The reference to “the day of the Lord” in Zephaniah 1:7 had a near eschatological fulfillment since Zephaniah 1:8-13 describes the situation in this prophet’s day in Judah.

However, in Zephaniah 1:14, the context would indicate that “the day of the Lord” will have a far eschatological fulfillment since Zephaniah 1:15-18 speaks of God judging the inhabitants of the earth which He will do during the Seventieth Week of Daniel.

So to summarize, “the day of the Lord” prophecies were already fulfilled in history in several different ways: (1) Assyrian deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. (Amos 5:18, 20), (2) locust plague in Joel’s day (Joel 1:15), (3) Babylonian exile of Judah between 605-586 B.C. (Zeph. 1:7; Ezek. 13:5), (4) Babylonian defeat of Egypt in 586 B.C. (Ezek. 30:3), (5) destruction of Edom (Obad. 1-14).

There are several “day of the Lord” prophecies which will be fulfilled during the last three and a half years of Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Zeph. 1:14; Joel 2:1; 2:11, 31; 3:14; Zechariah 14:1-2; Is. 13:6-16).

There are some that will be fulfilled through the Second Advent of Jesus Christ (Zech. 14:3-8) and His subsequent millennial reign (Zech. 14:9-21; Joel 3:17-21).

There are certain features with regards to all of these “day of the Lord” prophecies.

First, there is God’s judgment of sin and His sovereignty over the nations including Israel.

There is also the concept of imminency in regards to those prophecies having a near eschatological fulfillment (Joel 1:15; Is. 13:6; Zeph. 1:7; Ezek. 30:3) as well as those having a far eschatological fulfillment (Obad. 15; Joel 3:14; Zeph. 1:14).

There was also the idea of God’s blessing on the nations and Israel and her future restoration under her Messiah and King.

Therefore, we can conclude that the phrase “the day of the Lord” prophecies described the immediate future as well as those events taking place during the Seventieth Week of Daniel and Christ’s Second Advent and millennial reign.

Thus, in far eschatological sense, the “day of the Lord” is “not” a literal twenty-four period but rather, it is an extended period of time.

It begins with God’s dealing with Israel after the rapture of the church that takes place prior to Daniel’s Seventieth Week.

It extends through the Second Advent of Jesus Christ and His millennial reign, culminating with the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

However, the day of the Lord could also be a period of time taking place during the prophet’s own lifetime or not too long after.