

DAY OF THE LORD

The biblical concept of the day of Yahweh refers to the idea of God's future coming in order to judge Israel, the nations, or even the world and the cosmos. Proclaiming the day of Yahweh has, therefore, mainly a critical function, although in some cases a salvific implication for (parts of) Israel (and the nations) is implied. The temporal specification not only means literally a single day but can also, as often, figuratively

refer to a certain period of time (see Weinfeld, 2005, pp. 69–71).

Attestation and Religious-Historical Background.

The exact expression *yôm yhw*, “the day of Yahweh,” constituting the adequate basis for investigating the concept (Hoffmann, 1981, p. 37f.), up to now is not attested in epigraphic sources; and within the Hebrew Bible, the 16 references are limited to the latter prophets, with the main focus on the 12 minor prophets (Isa 13:6, 9; Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18 [2x], 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14 [2x]; Mal 3:23). Furthermore, about 10 related formulations with several extensions such as *yomla-yhw*, “a day from [for] Yahweh” (Isa 2:12; Ezek 30:3; see Zech 14:1), or—looking backward at the destruction of Jerusalem 587/586—*běyôm ‘ap-yhw*, “on the day of the anger of Yahweh” (Lam 2:22; see 1:12; 2:1), are to be added (see Nogalski, 2003, pp. 192–196). With the exception of Lamentations, the same restriction on the literary prophetic corpus (Isiah—Malachi) stays valid. This changes if one includes also formulations qualifying the day, such as *ym mlhmt*, “the day of war” (Kuntillet Ajrud 4.2, 1.5; see also 1 Sam 13:22; Prov 21:31; Hos 10:14; Amos 1:14), but not identifying it explicitly as the day of Yahweh. In contrast, expressions such as “the day of Midian” (Isa 9:3) and “the day of Egypt” (Ezek 30:9), which at first sight may seem parallel, name the object (not the acting subject as in *yôm yhw* in the *nomen rectum*) (Norin, 2009, p. 38). Thus, the following survey confines itself to the expression *yôm yhw* and its specific conceptual framework discernible in the biblical texts.

Rather controversial is whether the religious-historical background still can be reconstructed. While the general phrase *ūm ili*, “the day of God,” is absent in the Hebrew Bible, there are a few analogous expressions to *yôm yhw* in Akkadian such as *ūm dEnlil*, “the day of Enlil,” and *ūm dIštar*, “the day of Ištar,” referring to festive days for the respective gods (see CAD 20, 150; Müller, 2010, 584f.; see also *yémé habbē ‘ālim*, “the days of the Baals,” Hos 2:15). Thus, with all due caution (several scholars have criticized all such hypotheses as too speculative; see Everson, 1974, p. 330; Barton, 2004, p. 70), an originally cultic *Sitz im Leben* (so Mowinckel, 1958; Gray, 1974; Stolz,

1972, pp. 159ff.; see also “the day of Yahweh’s feast/sacrifice [ze^obaH],” Zeph 1:8) seems to be preferable to a rooting in concepts of holy war (so especially von Rad, 1959; Jeremias, 1965, pp. 97ff.) or hemerology (so Černý, 1948, pp. 77ff.). However, this preference does not exclude a traditional and literary-historical influence of the latter two ideas on the (younger) day of Yahweh texts in the Hebrew Bible that use terms and motives from all three areas (see Beck, 2005, p. 60f.). Irrespective of the assessment of these processes, the present biblical day of Yahweh texts clearly evince distinctive concepts, on which the following overview will concentrate.

The Eschatological Transformation (Amos 5:18–20).

One of the most prominent texts is Amos 5:18–20, which often is held to be the oldest passage (see, e.g., Weinfeld, 2005, p. 69, according to whom Amos even coined the term)—be it from Amos himself or from a preexilic redactor. In any case, the passage obviously presupposes the addressee having an established positive meaning of the “day of Yahweh” (against Weiss, 1966). This view is critically taken up and reversed into a lamentation of the dead directed at the ones desiring the day of Yahweh: it does not bring light but—inverting and revoking the divine order of creation—darkness; that is, Yahweh’s coming will not effect help and salvation but retribution and doom, and that unescapably (v. 19).

Thus, the day of Yahweh fits well in the imminent judgment against Israel proclaimed by Amos. Obviously, this “eschatological” meaning differs strikingly from the assumed cultic background mentioned: Amos’s day of Yahweh lies in the (near) future and is a singular event not regularly celebrated in cult feasts (acclaiming the theophanic presence usually implying salvation but also open for calamity). However one reconstructs the traditional historical background, Amos or his successors unmistakably transform the concept in his or their distinct eschatological way. This innovation then has heavily influenced further biblical passages depending on Amos’s impact and increasingly expanding the eschatological scenario.

The Theophanic Elaboration Concerning Israel and All Creatures (Zeph 1). This applies especially to Zephaniah 1, where (perhaps still in the late preexilic

period) the nearly approached (*qārôb*) day of Yahweh (vv. 7, 14) is fueled by his anger about the social injustices in Jerusalem; the day is presented as Yahweh's day of sacrifice (v. 8), bringing distress and anguish, and theophanic motives are prominently integrated (vv. 14–15). The whole scenario, albeit focusing on Jerusalem and Judah, envisions (on a redactional layer) the cutting off of all humanity and creature (vv. 2–3). Here, one sees a first (theophanic) elaboration of the eschatological scenario, redactionally combining a particular judgment over Israel with a universal one over the nations or even the cosmos.

The Judgment against Israel (Ezek 13). The first variant, a particular judgment over Israel, can be observed especially in Ezekiel 13, where (pseudo) prophets are criticized for lulling Israel into a false sense of security with regard to Yahweh's future judgment on Israel. Without being sent by Yahweh, these prophets follow their own spirit, proclaiming false divinations instead of building "a wall for the house of Israel." As a result, Israel is not able to "stand firm in the battle on the day of Yahweh" (v. 5), but also these lying prophets are due to the judgment, according to Ezekiel.

Yahweh's Day in Past and Future (Lam; Obad; Joel 1–2). Although the exact expression of the day of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible always refers to a future eschatological event (differently Everson, 1974), similar expressions can also refer to past events. First of all, this concerns mainly the destruction of Jerusalem inaugurating the exilic period. Attempting to deal with the collective trauma of the Exile, especially in Lamentations, a historization takes place that portrays historical events with the eschatological colors of the concept of Yahweh's day. In postexilic times, a similar process can be observed in Joel 1–2: the already realized drought and plague of locusts gain transparency for, and are a prelude to, the future day of Yahweh (1:15; 2:1/2:11) afflicting all inhabitants of the land. And in Obadiah the look back at 587/586 is followed by announcing the rapidly coming judgment over all nations (vv. 15a, 16–21) sparing only Zion (v. 17).

Here, also the question of how to survive the day of Yahweh is clearly reflected, and this problem appears

repeatedly in later passages (Joel 2:11; 3:4–5; Engl. 3:16; Mal 3:2; Zech 14), often contrasting with the nearness and the destructiveness of Yahweh's coming day.

The Judgment Against the Nations, the Earth, and the Cosmos (Isa 13; Engl. Joel 3). The second variant, an eschatological judgment against the nations and/or the cosmos, is broadly depicted in the Babylon oracle in Isaiah 13, which opens the cycle against the nations (Isa 13–23) and was possibly formulated for this context. Taking up Zephaniah 1, Yahweh's day is again near (v. 6), evoking humanity's fear (vv. 6–8) and coming with wrath and fierce anger (v. 9), devastating not only the sinners but also the earth and even the cosmos (vv. 10–13), it being the day of Yahweh's fierce anger (v. 13).

The picture in Joel 3 (probably Hellenistic) differentiated further in its broad elaboration of a Zion-centered end-time scenario (see also Joel 3; Zech 14). Here, the cosmic turmoil, exhibiting proto- or early apocalyptic traits, is not a consequence of, but precedes the coming of, "the great and terrible day of Yahweh" (Engl. 2:31; see 4:15), which everyone who calls the name of Yahweh will survive (3:5). The same combination features also in Joel 3 (probably also a Hellenistic layer, though older than Joel 3), depicting Yahweh's judgment on the foreign nations in Jerusalem (vv. 9–16), whereas he is a refuge and stronghold for his people Israel (v. 16).

Elijah and the Day of Yahweh (Mal 3). Probably the youngest day of Yahweh passage in the Book of the Twelve is Malachi 3:23 within the section completing the Prophets (Mal 3:22–24). Although presupposing the universal concept just outlined, Malachi 3 focuses on Israel's interior differentiation between the righteous and the wicked (vv. 13–21), stressing that only the first group will be saved on the day of Yahweh (vv. 17, 20). Verses 23 and 24 insert the arrival of Elijah, reconciling the generations before the coming of "the great and terrible day of Yahweh" (3:23 quoting Joel 3:4).

Reception in the New Testament. The exact expression "day of Yahweh," of course, is not attested in the New Testament; but the concept has been received, although with the Christological transformation to be expected. Especially the apostle Paul uses expressions such as "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"

(1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6), which were integrated in comprehensive eschatological scenarios.

The Day of Yahweh in the Literary Prophets. The concept of the day of Yahweh and its tradition history substantiates the importance of the idea over a long period, spanning from the beginnings to the later stages of the prophetic literature, always adapting to the specific historical and literary contexts. These circumstances refute the assumption of a single coherent redactional layer as clearly as they prove significant interdependencies between the book of Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve (e.g., Isa 13/Joel 1–2), on the one hand, and within the Book of the Twelve, on the other hand (e.g., Joel 3:4/Mal 3:23; see Rendtorff, 1998; Beck, 2005; Schwesig, 2006; Wöhrle, 2006, 2008). Thus, the concept of the day of Yahweh takes an important long-term role in the process of the formation of the Book of the Twelve and the (latter) prophets.

[See also Apocalypticism; Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets); Cult and Worship; Eschatology; Festivals and Holy Days; Light and Darkness; Soteriology; and War (Holy War).]

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