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The Day of the Lord

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What does it mean for Yahweh to have a day?¹ Sigmund Mowinckel saw it as a day of manifestation or epiphany at the New Year's festival, including the celebration of Yahweh's kingship and His saving acts for His people. The eschatological day of Yahweh is only the final and supreme day of Yahweh's enthronement, entirely secondary to His cult day.²

More recent discussion, however, has focused on Gerhard von Rad's identification of the day of Yahweh as a pure event of war, with imagery going back to the holy wars of Yahweh in which He appeared personally to annihilate His enemies.³

According to Frank M. Cross, Jr., these diverse interpretations can be reconciled by recognizing that the day of Yahweh is

All chapter and verse numbers are those of the English versions.

¹ A general survey of older suggestions is found in Ladislav Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: Nákladem Filosofické Fakulty University, 1948). The New Testament recasts this term as the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10; day of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; day of [Jesus] Christ, Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16).

² Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 145 ff.

³ Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* IV (April, 1959), 97—108. Von Rad notes that twice a prophet connects the eschatological war with one of the holy wars of Israel: Is. 9:4 = Judg. 7 and Is. 28:21 = 2 Sam. 5:20, 25.

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both the day of His victory in warfare and the day of His royal festival. Israel's cult was able to unite imagery from (a) the holy-war conquest traditions with (b) creation-kingship motifs primarily because Yahweh, the heavenly warrior, led the action in both events. Thus Psalm 24 celebrates the kingship of Yahweh and His role as creator in language stemming back in part to processions marking His military victory for early Israel. This wedding of Exodus and creation-kingship themes is best seen in Is. 51:9-11, but it also provides the specific metaphors for eschatological passages in general, and the day of Yahweh in particular.⁴

YAHWEH'S PARTICIPATION ON HIS DAY

Among the many titles for this day,⁵ some deal with Yahweh's extreme displeasure with Israel or with the nations. It is a day of wrath ('*ebrâ* or *getsep*), anger ('*ap*), fierce anger (*charôn 'ap*), jealousy (*qin'á*), rage (*chēmá*), and indignation (*za'am*). Ezekiel suggests a complete break of relations when he says, "An end has come" (7:6). One of the fullest descriptions of the day occurs in Zephaniah:

A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,

⁴ Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," *Biblical Motifs*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 11—30.

⁵ A convenient, nearly complete table of these occurrences may be found in Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord' — Reconsidered," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXXVII (1966), 29—60, and Table B after p. 60.

a day of ruin and devastation,
 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness,
 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
 (1:15-16 and compare Joel 2:2).

A number of these terms imply theophany, and the theophany of Yahweh on His day is central to its interpretation as holy war or cultic festival. Darkness and gloom can express metaphorically the dreadful nature of this day as we see in Amos, the first prophet to refer to this day: "Is not the day of Yahweh darkness and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it" (5:20)? But "darkness" is also a theophanic term, linked with "fire," "clouds," and "thick darkness" in the descriptions of Yahweh's appearance on Sinai (Deut. 4:11; 5:22). According to H. W. Wolff, the fire mentioned in Joel 2:3 also stems from the theophanic ideology of the day of Yahweh,⁶ while clouds also here serve as the emblem of Yahweh *par excellence*. Consider the "pillar of cloud" and the following passages: "Behold, the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud" (Ex. 16:10); "And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud." (Ex. 24:16)

"Thick darkness," whose precise denotation in Hebrew is unclear, is used almost exclusively elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the appearance of Yahweh: "He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under His feet" (2 Sam. 22:10); "Yahweh reigns. . . . Clouds and thick darkness are round about Him" (Ps. 97:2); "What does El know? Can He judge through the thick darkness?"

⁶ Hans Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheten, Joel* in *Biblischer Kommentar*, XIV, 5 (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1963), ad loc. Cf. also Zeph. 1:18.

Thick clouds enwrap Him" (Job 22:13 f.). In fact, this association of the day of Yahweh with theophany allows Ezekiel to refer to the destruction of Judah, a past day of Yahweh, in the following manner: "So will I seek out My sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness" (34:12). The use of clouds, darkness, thick darkness, and even thunder (Joel 2:11 and 3:16) to describe the epiphany of Yahweh on His day stems back ultimately to Israel's early confession that Yahweh is Lord of the storm (Ps. 29) and the "one who rides on a cloud." (Ps. 68:4)⁷

Yahweh's participation in Israel's wars of conquest was marked by seismic disturbances: "When Thou didst march from the region of Edom, the earth trembled" (Judg. 5:4). "Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because He was angry" (compare also 1 Sam. 14:15, Ps. 68:8, and 77:18). The earth is to be convulsed in similar fashion at the day of Yahweh, but here the earthquake takes on other connotations as well. It can even be used to mark a kind of apocalyptic destruction or transformation of the cosmos: "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place" (Is. 13:13). Weird heavenly spectacles accompany Yahweh's vengeance on Edom: "All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine" (Is. 34:4; compare Rev. 6:12-

⁷ The relationship of this imagery to the contemporary Canaanite world is extensively treated by Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh Versus Baal* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1964), pp. 73-91.

17). This is carried much farther in the following passage from Zechariah: "On that day His (Yahweh's) feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall draw northward, and the other half southward" (14:4).⁸ Recently, it has been suggested that such terminology connotes more than theophany or, metaphorically, calamity; it also signals the participation of the whole cosmos in the wars of Yahweh.⁹ When Yahweh calls His council, His heavenly army, to fight, all creation joins in, just as it did in His wars for Israel in early times (see Joshua 10:12-13; Judg. 5:20; Hab. 3:11). Observe how the heavenly bodies participate in the eschatological wars of Yahweh versus Babylon: "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" (Is. 13:10). This usage recurs in Joel both in passages against Israel (2:10) and against the nations. (3:15)

Finally, these transformations in the heavenly sphere are interpreted by Joel also as warning signs preceding the day of Yahweh: "The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh

⁸ But even in relatively late passages the shaking of the earth can serve merely as a sign of the presence of Yahweh: "The earth quakes before Him, the heavens tremble" (Joel 2:10; cf. 3:16). See the RSV for a different interpretation of this passage, where the pronoun is translated with a plural, though it is a singular form.

⁹ Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War," *Vetus Testamentum*, XVIII (January 1968), 100-107.

comes" (2:31).¹⁰ Joel's promise of warnings before the day recalls the earlier message in the book of Malachi: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. And He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (4:5-6). These signs of theophany and cosmic changes are not isolated phenomena, but are part of the holy-war or divine-warrior ideology as it was transmitted by the royal cult. Von Rad has proposed a traditional sequence of holy-war events in Joel 2:1-11 and several other "day of Yahweh" passages: summons to war;¹¹ dismay; earthquake; darkness; and the voice of Yahweh.¹²

In a recent study Patrick D. Miller has elucidated some of the ways in which the divine council as cosmic or heavenly army participates in the eschatological wars of Yahweh.¹³ In Is. 13:3 Yahweh levies a host for battle that includes "My consecrated ones," "My mighty men," and "My proudly exulting ones." Just as the army

¹⁰ Jesus lists these same signs as heralds of the Parousia in Luke 21:25-28. The passages from Joel 2:31 and Is. 34:4 provide the vocabulary for Rev. 6:12 f.

¹¹ Zephaniah calls it a day of "trumpet" and "shout," and both of these sounds are characteristic of the initiation of holy war (trumpet: Judg. 3:27; 6:34 f.; 1 Sam. 13:3; shout: Joshua 6:5; 1 Sam. 17:20, 52). Gerhard von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), pp. 6, 11.

¹² Recent rejection of this proposal by Weiss, *op. cit.*, certainly goes too far, but he is correct, perhaps, insofar as the passages will not all fit the schema of Israel's wars against her enemies. Nonetheless, Yahweh plays a central role as warrior in many of these passages, and in this sense they are related to holy war.

¹³ Miller, *op. cit.*

of Israel kept itself ritually clean, so the members of Yahweh's heavenly army—the hosts which Yahweh musters for battle come from the ends of the heavens—are consecrated (*līmḡaddāshbāy*). Although it is uncertain what earthly armies, if any, participate in this battle, the role of the heavenly forces is quite definite. Miller argues that the plural imperative "proclaim" in Joel 3:9 is addressed to the angelic council which transmits the message in turn to the nations. While the nations prepare (*qaddeshu*) for war and stir up their warriors, a voice suddenly addresses Yahweh Himself with the command, "bring down *Your* warriors," for the final apocalyptic battle (vv. 10-11). These *gibborim* are heavenly warriors also in the War Scroll from Qumran. (IQM xv:4)

Military imagery can also be detected in the following "day of Yahweh" passage: "Yahweh utters His voice before His army" (Joel 2:11). Both in Isaiah (34:2, 5) and Malachi (4:6) the enemies of Yahweh are put under the sacral ban,¹⁴ while Yahweh's sword is a prominent weapon in several passages (Is. 34:5-6; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 7:15; 30:4, 6). Zechariah makes unmistakable the interpretation of the day of Yahweh as the final holy war: "Then Yahweh will go forth and fight . . . as when He fights on a day of battle." (14:3)

At times the action of Yahweh is compared to a communal sacrifice, a figure which combines martial and cultic motifs. According to Zephaniah (1:7 f.), Yahweh has prepared a sacrificial meal on His day at which the nations appear as the invited

guests, while the officials and people of Judah are Yahweh's victims. This sacrificial imagery for the day of Yahweh is applied by Jeremiah to Yahweh's victory over Egypt in the famous battle of Carchemish in 605. Note the fine poetic touch by which the sword of the warrior is also the sacrificial knife: "The sword shall devour and be sated, and drink its fill of their blood. For Yahweh God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates" (46:10). Finally, the metaphor is extended to almost extreme proportions in the Isaianic poem against Edom:

For My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
 behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
 upon the people I have doomed.
 Yahweh has a sword; it is sated with blood,
 it is gorged with fat,
 with the blood of lambs and goats,
 with the fat of the kidneys of rams.
 For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah,
 a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
 (34:5-6)

This, of course, is reminiscent of the apocalyptic passage in Ezekiel 39 where the carrion beasts and birds are invited to gorge themselves with the blood of the enemies of Yahweh, pictured under the guise of sacrificial animals (cf. Rev. 19:17-21). Ultimately this imagery plays a large role in defining the messianic banquet, the great eschatological meal to which the victorious Yahweh invites His elect. (Cf. Is. 25:6; 55:1 ff.)¹⁵

¹⁴ For the use of the word *chrm* as a technical term see Von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg*, pp. 13 f.

¹⁵ See Frank M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 90 ff.

THE IMPACT AND EFFECT OF THE DAY

A distinctive—and understandable—feature of the early holy wars and the day of Yahweh is the way in which the enemy is completely mesmerized. Thus, the hands of the warriors grow weak and useless on Yahweh's day (Is. 13:7 f.; Jer. 47:4; Ezek. 7:14, 17, 27). Panic (*me^ehumá*) seizes them, making the battle a clean-up operation, rather than a real confrontation.¹⁶ This panic is experienced by all the enemies of Yahweh—be they Israel or the nations—on His day of battle. One of the longest titles for the day occurs in Is. 22:5: "Yahweh, God of hosts, has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion." Ezekiel calls it a day of panic and not of joyful shouting (7:7), while a later prophet declares: "On that day a great panic from Yahweh shall fall on them, so that . . . the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other" (Zech. 14:13). In addition to the apprehension expressed in calling this a day of wrath or anger, three prophets sum up the day as the great and terrible day of Yahweh (Joel 2:11, 31; Zeph. 1:14; Mal. 4:5). It is also once called cruel (Is. 13:9). In four prophecies the onset of the day is met with a command to "wail" because the day is near (Is. 13:6; Ezek. 30:2; Joel 1:5, 11, 13; Zeph. 1:10-11).¹⁷ Both Joel and Malachi ask in desperation, "Who can endure the day of Yahweh?" (Joel 2:11 and Mal. 3:2). Agony like that of a woman in childbirth seizes Yahweh's ene-

mies in the battle (Is. 13:8; Ezek. 30:16, Joel 2:6), and anguish comes upon them (Ezek. 30:4, 9). Joel reaches back to preceding prophecies (Is. 13:8 and Nah. 2:10) when he declaims: "Before Him [Yahweh] . . . all faces grow pale" (2:6). Even the poetic intensity of the "day of Yahweh" passages emphasizes its awesome character. With a pounding insistency, the poems are filled with eerie repetition: 10 times in quick succession in Isaiah 2 the day is listed as *against* some evil; 13 times in Ezekiel 7 the day is said to be "coming"; six times in Zeph. 1:15-16 it is said to be "a day of" . . . wrath, anger, etc., while Obad. 12-14 forms a finely woven texture in which "day of," "misfortune-calamity-distress," and Edom's responses of "gloating, boasting, and looting" recur again and again.

Imminence forms a persistent theme in discussions of the day of Yahweh. On eight occasions the prophets use a pregnant cliché, "Near is the day of Yahweh" (Is. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14), which Von Rad has interpreted as a cry of the Israelite warriors as they entered battle, despite the fact that it is only used in these passages, and that there is no explicit indication that the warriors utter it. We prefer to see this clause as an alternate way of saying that the day is coming soon (Is. 63:4; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 2:2; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5), an interpretation confirmed, we believe, by very similar phraseology in Isaiah, "For soon my salvation will come" (56:1), and Jeremiah, "The calamity of Moab is near at hand" (48:16). A close study of Zeph. 1:14, in fact, at once emphasizes the impending character of the day and rebuts Von Rad's notion of a holy-war cry:

¹⁶ Cf. Von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg*, p. 12 f.

¹⁷ As Wolff observes, this word characteristically is used to summon the congregation to lament, and Joel's repeated use of it in 1:5-14 is merely an extension of and commentary on the earlier usages.

The great day of Yahweh is near,
 near and hastening fast (!);
 the day of Yahweh is swifter than a
 runner,
 and faster than a warrior.¹⁸

In a context not explicitly associated with the day of Yahweh, Ezekiel makes the same point. To those who say that the days go on and on and every prophecy of judgment comes to naught, Ezekiel proclaims: "The days (of judgment) are at hand and the fulfillment of every vision." (12:23)

Since Yahweh fights on His day of battle, there will be few survivors. Amos caustically remarks that the day is as if a man fled from a lion, only to be met by a bear, or went into his safe home and leaned against the wall, only to have a snake fall down and bite him (5:19). Zephaniah reminds complacent Judah that neither gold nor silver will be able to save them on the day of Yahweh's wrath (1:18), an admonition repeated verbatim in the present text of Ezekiel (7:19). Other passages emphasize the vain attempt of men to hide (Is. 2:10, 19) and the sure death of all who are discovered (Is. 13:15; cf. also Is. 22:3; Ezek. 7:15-16; Obad. 18). Zephaniah promises that *perhaps*—with a humble seeking of Yahweh and obedience to His commands—the citizens and officials will be hidden (2:3), while the poet of Lamentations points to concrete evidence: there was no one who escaped or survived when Judah fell on the day of Yahweh's wrath (2:22). Even Joel insists that nothing escapes the eschatological army once it is mobilized

(2:3), but in the whole structure of Joel, as we shall see below, the threat of destruction against Judah turns into a promise of glorious victory and deliverance.

THE OBJECTS OF YAHWEH'S WRATH

Predictably, some in Israel regarded this future day of Yahweh's victory over His enemies as automatically favorable to Israel. With shallow optimism they scorned the prophetic call for true repentance and righteous living and banked on Yahweh's grace toward Israel—regardless! But to count on the cultic celebration of Yahweh's kingship as insurance against His wrath is sheer folly: "I hate, I despise your feasts. . . . Take away from Me the noise of your songs. . . . Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:21-24). The other references to the day of Yahweh reflect a dual threat: sometimes it is directed against Israel and Judah,¹⁹ sometimes against the nations.²⁰ Throughout, however, the implication remains that judgment would be averted if Israel would repent. Only in a passage like Isaiah 61 is Yahweh's day regarded as one of complete favor for Israel, with almost no trace of the martial-judgmental imagery. But this comes as a late exception, when the day of Yahweh could be used as a stock phrase, largely outside its original context.

¹⁹ The following passages seem to be directed against Israel, Judah, or Jerusalem: Is. 2:6-22; Lam. 1:12; 2:1, 21-22; Ezek. 7; 13:5; 34:12; Joel 1 and 2; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1 and 2; Mal. 4:1-6.

²⁰ The following passages seem to be directed against the nations: Is. 13 (Babylon); 34 (Edom); 63 (Edom and others); Jer. 46 (Egypt); 47 (Philistines); Ezek. 30 (Egypt and Ethiopia); 39 (Gog); Joel 3 and 4 (all nations). Zech. 14 deals with both Israel and the nations, q. v.

¹⁸ We have followed the editor's suggestion in *Biblia Hebraica* and redivided the Hebrew words for the last two lines. Cp. *per contra* the translation in the RSV.

In some "day of Yahweh" passages, the specific offense of the threatened is not spelled out, although the general context of the prophet usually makes clear his religious concerns. In Is. 2, however, Yahweh's day is specifically directed against all that is proud and lofty; Is. 13 castigates the nations for their evil, iniquity, arrogance, and ruthlessness; Is. 22 scores the lack of faith in Judah; Ezek. 7 excoriates the people for their "ways," their abominations, violence and iniquity. Obadiah chastises Edom for gloating, rejoicing, and boasting over Judah's fall. Finally, Mal. 4 is directed against all evildoers. But as Wolff has insisted, the primary theme in the old holy wars and in many of the day of Yahweh predictions is not guilt. Rather, more stress is placed on the positive relationship to God necessary to avoid the fearsome day. For Joel this means: repent and look toward the entirely new acts of God with reverent fear and trembling; hope that God in His freedom will choose to show mercy.²¹

THE DAY OF YAHWEH AND ESCHATOLOGY²²

Scholars have widely disagreed as to whether the day of Yahweh is *in itself* an eschatological concept, especially in pre-exilic passages. Obviously, an answer to this question depends on the words "in itself," on a definition of eschatology and on decisions with regard to the dating of these oracles. We would have to demur on identifying the day of Yahweh as

eschatological "in itself" since on a number of occasions the day of Yahweh is clearly a past event. This is seen most clearly in Lamentations (1:12; 2:1, 21-22) and in Ezekiel (13:5 and 34:12), where the day of Yahweh denotes the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 587—86. Isaiah also uses "the day of Yahweh" in referring to a recent encounter with the Assyrians (22:5), while Jeremiah describes Egypt's contemporary defeat at Carchemish as a day of vengeance of the Lord Yahweh of hosts. (46:10)

How is eschatology to be defined? In a narrow sense, it means the doctrine of the things which concern the end of the world and the new hope that lies on the other side of history; or it means the catastrophic ending of the physical order and the beginning of a new spiritual order. Mowinckel and Fohrer, who subscribe to some such definition, would accordingly deny that this corresponds to the type of punishment foretold in the day of Yahweh passages—at least until after the exile. But if eschatology is more broadly defined as the study of ideas and beliefs concerning the end of the present world *order*, and the creation of a *new order*, thus emphasizing the intra-historical character of many of the happenings, then we can say that the pre-exilic prophets did have an eschatology of doom,²³ and that, as we know from the rest of their message, they looked for a new day when God would intervene to reactivate His elections traditions. During the exile, with the threat of judgment for Israel largely passed, the prophets an-

²¹ Wolff, pp. 14 ff.

²² Recent scholarship seems agreed that eschatology is a product of Israel's view of God and history, and it is not to be linked to a so-called preprophetic eschatology derived from Babylonia (*pace* Gressmann).

²³ A very helpful discussion of Old Testament eschatology with ample bibliography occurs in R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1965), pp. 103—18.

nounced that Yahweh was about to do something really new with the remnant of Israel. At about the same time, increasing attention was given in the day of Yahweh passages to the radical changes in the cosmos—earthquake, darkening of the heavenly bodies, etc.—an emphasis that reaches full fruition in the apocalyptic tradition. (E. g., Zech. 14)

JOEL AND THE DAY OF YAHWEH²⁴

No Old Testament prophet treats the day of Yahweh so extensively and systematically as Joel. In his proclamation of the day of Yahweh he reuses many old prophetic words and literary forms in a context divorced from their original setting in life. Chapter 1 consists of a call to lament, emphasizing the severity of the current locust plague and drought. To Joel the present distress is but an ominous warning that the prophetic day of Yahweh is yet to be fulfilled. H. W. Wolff has suggested that Joel here rejects the self-security of the fourth-century Jerusalem theocratic cultus which had assumed that its *cultic* community was the final goal of the activity of God toward man.

With chapter 2 the distress described is escalated from the contemporary locust plague to the final, eschatological turmoil. Consequently, the chapter begins with the sounding of an alarm and the depiction of a great enemy army, a picture informed by the oracles against foreign nations and by older prophecies of the day of Yahweh and the enemy from the north, not to mention analogies drawn to the locusts themselves. Yahweh leads this army as the theophanic language makes clear. In

the face of such a day Joel calls for repentance on the basis of Yahweh's essence and will (13b) and in the hope of future acts of salvation. (14)

Midway, the tone of the book undergoes a dramatic transition (2:18) for the remainder is devoted to assuring Jerusalem a new, saved, and bountiful life, including complete and final victory over all the nations. This transition from a communal lament to an oracle of salvation finds an analogue in the first and second parts of the following Psalms: 60:1-5 and 6-8; 85:1-7 and 8-13; 2 Chron. 20:6-13 and 14-17. The new life results from Yahweh's self-revelation: (a) He is in the midst of Israel; (b) He is the God of Israel who will not let Israel again be put to shame before its enemies (v. 27). Both the present distress of locusts and drought (2:19a, 21-26) and the impending danger (19b, 20, 28-32) will be turned away. The great catastrophes and cosmic upheavals which will come are no longer signs for despair, but are signals and assurances that Yahweh's victorious day for Israel is very near. In chapter 3 Joel begins with an announcement of judgment on all the nations, an announcement which is picked up in the intricate poetry of the summons to battle in verses 9-14.²⁵ Verse 17 serves as the real goal of the chapter: "So you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who dwells in Zion, My holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it." By prophesying that God will live personally in Jerusalem, Joel offers an alternative to the theocratic

²⁴ The following discussion is derived in large part from Wolff.

²⁵ Cf. "all nations" (vs. 2 and 9, 11-12); "gather" (vs. 2 and 11); "valley of Jehoshaphat" (vs. 2 and 12); and "judge" (vs. 2 and 12).

theology of the priestly circles. As one of the last Old Testament prophets to treat the day of Yahweh, Joel assures his readers—and through Christ also us—that the people of God are surrounded only by sinking opponents, and that deliverance on the day of Yahweh depends exclusively on a relationship to the One who comes.

THE DAY OF YAHWEH TODAY

The imagery of the day of Yahweh provides a rich background for considering the eschatology of the New Testament and the Day of Judgment. But we dare not just “consider” it. Rather, we must apply the threat and promise inherent in this Day to our situation as well. It is not enough to be Israelites or Christians in name. When justice in the community

is not the goal of the people of God, when war, poverty, prejudice, and other sins are accepted as inevitable, when security is predicated on an ethnic or ecclesiastical heritage that endeavors to lock the saving God in a box, then the confrontation with the living God is as horrible to contemplate as the martial pictures of the prophetic day of Yahweh—and so we must proclaim.

But, contrariwise, the unalloyed hope which we offer to people today springs neither from a melioristic philosophy nor from our own goodness, but it is our faithful reaction to the impending new day of Yahweh when He, going forth like a mighty man and stirring up His fury like a man of war (Is.42) reaps the promises of His resurrection triumphs.

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