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**THE DAY OF YAHWEH: ITS BACKGROUND  
AND USAGE IN SELECTED PROPHETS**

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**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Old Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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by

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**June 1955**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the study of such literature as the prophetic writings, it is helpful to attack them from the vantage point of one basic concept. This enables one to steer clear of any pedantic involvement in unrelated facets of prophecy and to achieve a fresh approach to prophecy in its widest compass.

The idea of a Day of Yahweh serves as just such a basic concept. To approach the prophetic writings in quest for the meaning and significance of this concept opens up the broad panorama of prophecy, and moves one to concern himself with all that is involved in the nature of prophecy. The Day of Yahweh occupies a point of great significance in prophecy, and one can scarcely deal with the prophetic writings apart from coming to terms with this idea.

Coupled with the nature of prophecy is the fact that the Day of Yahweh plunges one into the whole character of eschatology in the Old Testament. It is in this concept that the nature of Old Testament eschatology comes to its fullest bloom. And it is likewise from this idea that New Testament eschatology receives its stimulus and shape.

The purpose of this study is to deal with some of the problems relevant to this broad, prophetic idea. This involves concerning ourselves with the origin of the idea, and the form it took in the prophetic mind. As a result,

we have devoted the first chapter to an investigation of certain problems connected with the origin and background of the idea. In the second and third chapters, our concern is with the concept as it unfolds itself in the prophetic books. In both these chapters, our intent is one of comparison and contrast, in seeking both common and diverse elements in those prophets who specifically use the concept. And finally, in the fourth chapter, a synthesis is to be sought, in which certain significant elements are singled out as bearing out the theological content of the Day of Yahweh. This involves particularly the eschatological aspects of the Day of Yahweh, and the description of Yahweh's personal activity.

It should be noted that this study has its limitations. Within its brief compass, it would be quite impossible to cover, with any amount of thoroughness, all the significant study that has been devoted to the Day of Yahweh. We are only able to indicate certain significant contributions, particularly as they throw light on our limited concern. At the same time, we could hardly claim to have exhausted the critical scholarship on the prophetic literature, but, to the extent that we are able, our intention has been to indicate it. Thus, in the datings of the books, and in the content itself, we have attempted to note what certain critical scholarship has brought to bear upon them. It does not necessarily imply our acceptance of all that we note, but it does indicate that we recognize that it has an important bearing upon our study.

Most of this material has been incorporated in the footnotes.

Our concern with the prophetic literature itself likewise meets, of necessity, certain limitations which are inescapable. It was necessary for us to become selective in our treatment of the various prophets. Thus, we have limited ourselves to those prophets who specifically make use of the patterned phrase, "The Day of Yahweh." This is done, however, in full appreciation of the fact that the concept has a strong bearing on the full sweep of prophetic literature.

The study is intended to unfold with an appreciable amount of continuity. If our initial purpose is to concern ourselves with the background of the concept, then we move from that to the prophets themselves, in order that the final chapter might draw together certain fruitful observations which will serve as a conclusion to the study. It is in this manner that we feel the significant subject that confronts us can be most expeditiously dealt with.

## CHAPTER II

### UNDERLYING FACTORS DEALING WITH THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT

It is a contribution of the developmental approach to history that one should search first of all for origins in attempting to study a problem such as the one that confronts us. However, if the problem of origin is the primary concern of this chapter, it must be said that any pre-suppositions of arbitrary emergence, which characterise the developmental and evolutionary views, do not supply the basic structure of this study. G. Ernest Wright has pointed out the weaknesses and misgivings of such an approach to the Old Testament record.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, when one approaches the prophetic writings, one becomes aware of the unique concern of the prophets with the idea of a Day of Yahweh. The problem becomes particularly complicated when one recalls that in the preprophetic records, there is an apparent lack of such a unified concept. The phrase "The Day of Yahweh" does not appear in the pre-prophetic writings, although, as we shall point out later in this chapter, there are a few possible parallels with another expression "in that day." Conjointly, the tremendous uplift of eschatology which clusters around the employment of this phrase is

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<sup>1</sup>G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), pp. 9 ff.

conceivably absent in the pre-prophetic record.

But why this phrase suddenly looms up in the prophetic records, with no indicated parallels before their time, is the problem that leads us to our concern about origins. An attempt must be made to bridge the gap, and to establish some sort of continuity between the pre-prophetic and prophetic writings. Some attempt must be made to determine the extent to which this concept may have been in use prior to the prophets, and the form it took in the thinking of the people.

The research of certain Old Testament scholars has attempted to resolve the problem of the spawning pools of the idea.<sup>2</sup> Of noteworthy importance are the differing views of Hugo Gressman and Sigmund Mowinckel.<sup>3</sup> Gressman advanced the thesis that, prior to the prophets, Israel assimilated a world-sweeping eschatology from the Canaanites and Babylonians, which finally became embodied in her concept of the Day of Yahweh.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Helpful criticisms of significant theories on the Day of Yahweh can be found in H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 138-143, and in Ladislav Cerny, The Day of Yahweh and some Relevant Problems (V Praze: Nakladem Filosofické Fakulty University Karlovy, 1948), pp. 27-52.

<sup>3</sup>Gressmann's thought is espoused in his book Der Ursprung der jüdisch-israelitischen Eschatologie (Göttingen, 1905). In connection with him the influence of H. Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit (Göttingen, 1895), is important. The theory of Mowinckel is found in his Psalmenstudien, II. Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie (Kristiania, 1922).

<sup>4</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, op. cit., p. 139.



Mowinckel, on the other hand, posits the origin of the concept within the cultus of Israel. At the annual New Year Enthronement Feast, which was specifically cultic observance, the climax was reached with the declaration "Yahweh is King."<sup>5</sup> As an extension of this cultic concept, the prophets were able to view the Day of Yahweh as chiefly eschatological. There is, thus, a comparative difference in the views of Gressmann and Mowinckel, the extent of which is such that "whereas Gressmann derived the day from the eschatology, Mowinckel derives the eschatology from the day."<sup>6</sup>

Other views are similarly important to note. T. H. Robinson finds the background for the concept in an eschatology taken over from the Canaanites, and possibly even earlier, from the Babylonians.<sup>7</sup> Julius Morgenstern, working in a different direction, traces its relation with the mythological belief in a "victory of light over darkness, good over evil," as represented, for example, in the mythological battle between Marduk and Tiamat.<sup>8</sup> J. M. Powis Smith points out that the Day of Yahweh is a grandiose attempt, upon the part of Israel, to project the power of her God to its furthest limit, and to insure

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Theodore H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), p. 197.

<sup>8</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, op. cit., p. 143.

His superiority over other nations and their gods.<sup>9</sup>

These theories may be considered as representative of the concern directed to the milieu in which the concept was initially cast. It may be that one can do little more than act on assumption concerning this problem, but, at any rate, it arises, and challenges anyone who aspires to demonstrate the importance of the Day of Yahweh to the early Hebrews and the prophets who preached to them.

It is quite generally agreed that Amos is the first of the prophets to specifically employ the concept.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, his harsh indictment of the people indicates the existence of a popularly accepted and yet vainly distorted view of the Day of Yahweh prior to his own time. This latter assumption prompts us to an even greater concern with the whole background underlying the origin of the concept. It is consequently with Amos that we must begin in attempting to explicate this problem.

In brief, Yahweh is to Amos a God who acts on stringently moral lines. He is a God who measures everything in terms of His covenant.<sup>11</sup> He acts neither altruistically nor arbitrarily. Yahweh is the God who desires the obedience of His

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<sup>9</sup>J. M. P. Smith, "The Day of Yahweh," American Journal of Theology, V (1907), 505-533.

<sup>10</sup>Amos 5: 18-20.

<sup>11</sup>In this connection Amos 3:2 would play in strong in the interpretation of his prophecy.

people. If they refuse to serve and obey Him, the Day of Yahweh will be the day of their annihilation. But if, conversely, they respond in righteous obedience to His will, then their expectation of deliverance will come to fruition.

This conception of Yahweh is the point at which we are able to pass back through Israel's history and to find some parallels between the "Yahweh of old" and the Yahweh who will come "in that day." It will become increasingly apparent, as we do this, that an investigation of Israel's faith in Yahweh is important for providing the background for the prophetic Day of Yahweh.

An essential part of the theme of the Old Testament is the inter-relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The covenant unites the two in unparalleled relationship. Israel has no history in which Yahweh is not involved, either as judging or delivering her. And, as Yahweh's covenant people, there is a strong note of accountability underlying her entire status. She is responsible to Yahweh in terms of His commandments and will. Thus, when Moses leads the people from Egypt, it is through him that Yahweh speaks:

If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give heed to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you, which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer. (Ex. 15:26)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>This quotation and those that follow throughout are taken from the Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, c. 1952).

In the same sense, Israel is to have nothing to do with foreign gods, nor is she to mix at random with peoples outside her own community (Ex. 23:23-24; 34:12-14). She is to be distinctly and peculiarly Yahweh's people alone. And, if she fulfills her role as His people, then Yahweh promises her, "I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" (Ex. 23:22).

The promise of deliverance over against her enemies took on special coloring in Israel's faith. It found its fullest expression in the Deliverance from Egypt. In the record of Israel's history, Yahweh is consistently described as the God who brought Israel "out of the land of Egypt."<sup>13</sup> And the same miracle was to continue to serve as a touchstone by which the prophets and others would interpret Israel's history to her.<sup>14</sup> Israel could not soon forget this thrilling act on her behalf.

The migratory years, prior to the occupation of Canaan, the inheritance of the land itself, and the consolidation of the tribes unfolded under the immediate leadership of Yahweh. He is involved in Israel's every battle, and leads her to victory over the armies that stand in her way. Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, fall before her (Num. 21). The tribes in Canaan give way to her coming (Josh. 23:4.5).

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<sup>13</sup>The giving of the Law is significantly found in this context. Cf. Ex. 20:2 and Deut. 5:6.

<sup>14</sup>Hosea 13:4 is only one of numerous later examples.

The people of Midian, the Ammonites, and the Philistines become subservient to her (Judges 6-16).

All of this could serve to build up within Israel a false sense of security, if she began to look at it apart from the covenant relationship and the personal responsibility which it involved. Thus, simultaneous with His leadership in her victories, Yahweh's purpose is consistently to bring her back to a recognition of His intentions. And this He does by acts of judgment upon her.

Such judgments from Yahweh impinged constantly upon Israel's history. Never was she able to act long without having her religious responsibility recalled to her. When she made herself a false god in the "golden calf," Yahweh expressed His wrath to Moses, "Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them" (Ex. 32:10). He permits the bowels of the earth to swallow up the family of Korah as an act of His judgment (Num. 16). He pronounces a stinging condemnation when He forbids a whole generation to enter Canaan (Num. 32:13). And, as they finally enter Canaan, and meet opposition from "the men of Ai," they can do nothing until the surreptitious actions of Achan are exposed (Josh. 7-8).

All of these incidents illustrate the proximity of judgment which hovers over Israel's every motive and act. The same continues through the complete history of Israel as God's people. The record of the Judges shows how Israel experienced hope during the period of the Shophetim, but met the wrath of

Yahweh in evil days (Judges 2:18). Solomon becomes conscious of the weighty "if" that pervades his function as king of this people. Yahweh promises good days if they fulfill their obligation as His people. But if they prove to be untrue, "Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples" (I Kings 9:7). The same can be said for the period of the Two Kingdoms, when Yahweh's judgment is meted out in the Assyrian and Babylonian onslaughts.

Consistently, Yahweh's purpose is to have a people set apart for Himself. He stands for nothing half-heartedly done. His people is to be responsible, pure, and obedient. And it is this very facet of Yahweh's person that must be noted for an understanding of the Day of Yahweh.

At the same time, we have indicated the extent to which Yahweh dispersed the peoples who stood in Israel's way if she remained obedient to Him. He seems always to have had the desire to act in this manner for His people, and appears sorrowful when, inversely, He was constrained to punish them through their enemies. As we have noted above, the Deliverance from Egypt becomes a rallying point for the historical Israel in her relation to Yahweh. More must be said about this to explicate further the pre-prophetic view of Yahweh.

It is to Moses that Yahweh speaks regarding the recalcitrance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians:

Then I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. And the

Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth My hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them. (Ex. 7:4-6)

This Yahweh did, in actions that, to a great extent, resemble the prophetic depiction of the Day of Yahweh. The eighth and ninth plagues of locusts (Ex. 10:14) and darkness (Ex. 10:22) are descriptive of media which Yahweh is again pictured as using "in His Day." And the great Day of Death (Ex. 12), when Yahweh swept through Egypt with His angel and annihilated the first-born, is indicative of the wide sweep His judgment could take.

This day Israel was prone to remember, nor was Yahweh content that they should ever forget it. The establishment of the Passover Feast occurs in this context (Ex. 12-13), digging a furrow into Israel's mind that she might perpetually remember. Yahweh speaks to them:

Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place. (Ex. 13:3)

All of the adornment of the tabernacle, the ritual and the vestments, were to be dedicated to Yahweh "who brought them forth from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 29:45.46). The appointment of the Levites, in similar fashion, is found in this connection (Num. 8). The Great Deliverance was to be an act tied up with the very life of Israel.

And precisely this it became. Israel was to find in this great act the basis for her view of Yahweh. Instead of cursing

Israel, Balaam is constrained to say:

God brings him out of Egypt;  
 he has as it were the horns of the wild ox,  
 he shall eat up the nations his adversaries,  
 and shall break their bones in pieces,  
 and pierce them through with his arrows.  
 He couched, he lay down like a lion,  
 and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?  
 Blessed be every one who blesses you,  
 and cursed be every one who curses you. (Num. 24:8-9)

Again, when Moses gathers the people together in the Arabah, his words show that Yahweh is greater than any other existent deity. He is that God whose mighty acts became concrete in the Great Deliverance.

Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:34)

This tremendous sense of Yahweh's delivering power was intricately linked up with the God whom Israel came to know. It found expression in the piety of such simple people as Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. She prays at Shiloh:

He will guard the feet of His faithful ones;  
 but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;  
 for not by might shall a man prevail.  
 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;  
 against them He will thunder in heaven.  
 The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
 He will give strength to His king,  
 and exalt the power of His anointed. (I Sam. 2:9-10)

A short time later, King David was to sense this same confidence in the Yahweh who would continue to deliver him from his enemies on the basis of the covenant relationship (II Sam. 23:23).



This phase of Yahweh's activity is directly related to His work as the "electing God." He cuts down Israel's enemies because she is His people. And if He is later pictured as doing this in the Day of Yahweh, it is never a judgment arbitrarily and capriciously performed. It is always in terms of His covenant with His people. For, to Yahweh, as we have attempted to show, the primary matter is the response of obedience. And it is when His people become most oblivious to their answerability before Him that He concurs in the attacks of foreign peoples to bring them back to a recognition of their obligations as His people.

It is at this point that Israel loses sight of the pristine conception of Yahweh. She was wont to remember only His miraculous delivering power, and to forget the personal accountability that permeated her life. And, projecting all of this into a future day, she was able to construct her own misdirected eschatology centered in what she felt the Day of Yahweh would be. It is to this confused sense of Yahweh's activity that Amos resurrects his strictly theocentric concept of the Day of Yahweh.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the Yahweh, whom the prophets picture as coming "in that day," is essentially the same Yahweh who addressed

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<sup>15</sup>See the more detailed discussion of Amos' use of the concept in Chapter II.

Himself to the Israel of old.<sup>16</sup> He is a God who calls for obedience from His people, and who must judge them for their disobedience. And yet, He is a God, who, on the very grounds of the covenant, reaches out with promise to His people, that, if they follow Him, He will restore them, and cast their enemies out before them. He is a God who both punishes and delivers. And, as this two-fold thread of activity is present with Him in the days of old, so, we shall see in a succeeding chapter,<sup>17</sup> He is pictured as acting in the Day of Yahweh. ✓

But, if the Yahweh who will come "in that day" will be essentially the same as the Yahweh who manifested Himself to an earlier Israel, the problem still remains that the prophets picture His activity in the framework of a distinctively developed eschatology. The problem as to the source of this strong eschatological sense is not an easy one.

One searches almost in vain to find some sort of eschatological sensitivity in the pre-prophetic records to cope with that which is found in the prophets. Perhaps the nearest parallel is in Deuteronomy,<sup>18</sup> where Yahweh says to Moses:

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<sup>16</sup>This will become clearer from the prophetic side as we treat them individually. The prophet Obadiah is the one apparent exception, and presents a problem from this angle.

<sup>17</sup>This matter is discussed more at length in Chapter IV.

<sup>18</sup>The dating of Deuteronomy would have a bearing upon this observation. It may be that the slim reference to anything like the prophetic Day of Yahweh is a point against assigning it a later date.

Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be devoured; and many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide My face in that day on account of all the evil which they have done, because they have turned to other gods. (Deut. 31:17.18)

Although this passage has a unique twist of reaching out to the future, even it is not comparable to the finality of the Day of Yahweh as depicted by some of the prophets.

If the answer is not to be found in the pre-prophetic records, one can do little more than act on the basis of assumption. Thus, many scholars have sought the answer in what Israel may have assimilated from other peoples.<sup>19</sup> Still others have attempted to describe its source in terms of a growth in the understanding of Yahweh.<sup>20</sup>

One, perhaps, does best by giving as theocentric an answer as possible, for the Old Testament remains a decidedly theocentric book. Thus, if the prophets were, as they claimed, "mouthpieces of Yahweh," so that Yahweh could touch the lips of Isaiah (Is. 6:7), command Jeremiah to speak (Jer. 1:7), and Ezekiel to eat the scroll containing his message (Ez. 3:1), and put confidently into the mouths of others a "Thus saith

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<sup>19</sup>We have attempted to point to the chief theories in this respect above.

<sup>20</sup>E.g., J. E. Fison, The Christian Hope (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1954), p. 35.

the Lord," it might be assumed that this was His own dispensation, that the time was right for eschatology, with the Kairos of the Incarnation a short skip over a few generations. It may be that the prophets took hold of that concept which the people were so greatly cherishing, and gave to it a distinctly theocentric emphasis. In any case, the latter is important, for Yahweh was wont to show, through His prophets, that, as in the past, He would both judge and deliver "in His day."

## CHAPTER III

### THE DAY OF YAHWEH IN PRE-EXILIC PROPHETS

#### AMOS

It has become apparent above that Amos represents a decided reversal of what the popular mind anticipated in the coming of the Day of Yahweh. In a sense, his view is representative of what this concept would become for most of the prophets. The Day of Yahweh would be a day on which no casual indifference could feast, but rather one with dreadful and telling implications.

Under Jeroboam II, Israel reached the zenith of her prosperity.<sup>1</sup> She found herself at last extricated from the dampening hold of Damascus, and saw her borders extend even as far as Hamath in Syria (II Kgs. 15:25.28). "Egypt was too weak to interfere, and Assyria had not yet begun the movement which ended in the conquest of Palestine."<sup>2</sup> The time was ripe for that kind of thinking which bore nationalistic overtones. Israel was to view herself as a people finally recovering the

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<sup>1</sup>The prophecy of Amos falls during the reign of Jeroboam II. Bewer places his reign from 784 to 744 B.C., and sets the time of Amos' call about 750 B.C. See Julius A. Bewer, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," Harper's Annotated Bible (New York: Harper and Brothers, c. 1949), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1934), p. 363.

splendor which characterized the Davidic reign.

Such being the case, Yahweh Himself was delimited to the sphere of her narrow thinking. If there was to come a Day of Yahweh, it would, as far as the people were concerned, be a day on which Yahweh would bring to final submission all the enemies of Israel, and would extend her own sway to the utmost.

This kind of thinking had a telling effect on the life and spirit of the people. It tended to plunge them into a security which was ill-founded. "The infatuation of the people is exposed in desiring the 'Day of Jehovah,' as though that could be anything but an interposition in their favor."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, her whole moral life suffered to such an extent that Amos was wont to speak out against it in stinging vituperation. He indicts her as knowing no concern for her lower classes (2:6), and of concurring in complacent immorality (2:7). He points to the women of Samaria as being such as "oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'" (4:1)

But, above all, Israel was guilty of what John Bright has designated as a diseased theology.<sup>4</sup> She had allowed herself to become involved in a futile mechanization of the covenant.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 315.

<sup>4</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), pp. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

It had become for her a covenant with no moral qualifications attached. She had become dissipated with the false security which results.

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,  
and to those who feel secure on the  
mountain of Samaria. (6:1).

But, for Amos, "the covenant is not mechanical and in the nature of things; it is a bilateral, moral agreement and can be voided."<sup>6</sup> The covenant is a living relationship existing between Israel and Yahweh. The covenant involves a personal belonging upon the part of Israel, and it is this personal link with Yahweh that forms the very matrix of her accountability.

You only have I known  
of all the families of the earth;  
therefore I will punish you  
for all your iniquities. (3:2)

To bring His people back to a realization of their obligations, Yahweh sent famine (4:6), drought (4:7.8), blight and mildew (4:9), pestilences like those in Egypt (4:10), and consuming destruction reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah (4:11). But, after it all, He is described as saying, "yet you did not return to me" (4:6, 8-11). He shows Amos the vision of the basket of summer fruit, and interprets it for him in intensely personal terms:

The end has come upon My people Israel;  
I will never again pass by them.  
The songs of the temple shall become wailings  
in that day. (8:2.3)

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

If Israel had become oblivious to her personal obligation to Yahweh, and if, as John Punnett Peters has observed, she was living "in a fool's paradise,"<sup>7</sup> then Amos could do little more than spring the complete reversal of the nature of the Day of Yahweh upon them.

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 him;  
 or went into the house and leaned with 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? (5:18-20)

The utter antithetical character of darkness over against light, in addition to the gradations of danger observed by Amos, combine to cast his concept of "the day" into a background of foreboding gloom. In his terms there is no escape from Yahweh's judgment, regardless of what the people may have conceived concerning the nature of the Day of Yahweh. With all of the force possible, Amos preaches the holiness of Yahweh's person.

Er ist einer der gewaltigsten Buss - und Gerichtsprediger Israels. Das innerste Wesen Gottes ist ihm strenge Gerechtigkeit im weitesten Sinne des Wortes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>John Punnett Peters, The Religion of the Hebrews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 431.

<sup>8</sup>Ernst Sellin, Einleitung in das Alte Testament, bearbeitet von Leonhard Rost (Heidelberg: Quelle u. Meyer, 1950), p. 128.



Before Yahweh's righteousness, Israel faces nothing short of doom. Amos holds out repentance as the only alternative to destruction.<sup>9</sup>

Seek good, and not evil,  
that you may live;  
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,  
as you have said. (5:14)

The judgment of the Day of Yahweh thus focuses first of all upon Israel. And, it is in place to observe, as most have done, that Amos is the first to turn the consuming fire of Yahweh's judgment upon Israel herself. Israel's unique relationship with Yahweh makes it imperative that judgment should begin with her. At the same time, Amos pictures Yahweh's judgment as taking a wide sweep, spreading also to such nations as Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (1-2). Thus, for him the Day of Yahweh will call the nations to account, but will put his own people primarily in the spotlight of judgment.

## ISAIAH

From Amos to Isaiah is but a brief span of a few

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<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that for many Amos is chiefly a prophet of doom, since such rays of hope as those in chapter five and in the closing verses of chapter nine are taken to be later additions, put in by someone who wished to relieve the dark picture the prophet had painted. See Theodore H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel, p. 71, and Julius A. Bewer, The Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, c. 1938), p. 93 for examples.

years.<sup>10</sup> In view of this, the influence of Amos upon Isaiah has become commonly recognized.

As a young man, Isaiah was decisively influenced by Amos and Hosea, who prophesied in Israel as Isaiah was entering manhood. With eyes opened by them he saw clearly into the social and religious conditions of his own Judean environment, so similar to those in the Northern Kingdom; the oppression of the poor and the miscarriage of justice; the selfish indulgence of the rich and the craving after wealth and power; the materialistic view of life and its indifference to God; superstition and idolatrous practices and soulless worship.<sup>11</sup>

Internally, therefore, the conditions called forth Isaiah's strengthened preaching of the Day of Yahweh. And externally, with the events of the Syro-Ephraimitic War, the fall of the Northern Kingdom, and the imminent danger sensed in the rise of Assyria, the time was propitious to call the people to self-scrutinization through the preachment of "the Day."

In chapters two and thirteen we find Isaiah's usage of the Day of Yahweh coming to its focus.<sup>12</sup> It is here, in particular, that we are able to observe what this day would involve for him.

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<sup>10</sup>According to Bewer, Isaiah prophesied between 738 and 701 B.C., and possibly thereafter. Julius A. Bewer, "The Book of Isaiah Volume I," Harper's Annotated Bible (New York: Harper and Brothers, c. 1950), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. See also J. M. Powis Smith, The Prophets and Their Times (Second edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c. 1941), p. 88.

<sup>12</sup>It, of course, would not be proper to limit the concept to these two chapters. We select these two, in which the formalized phrase is used, merely as a matter of convenience.

In chapter two, after Isaiah has been confronted with a vision of universal peace, the thought turns to the Day of Yahweh. Seriousness overtakes the elation which preceded. The prophet turns to admonish his people before the encroaching judgment of "the Day." He delineates for Judah the sins in which they have been involved. They have taken up evil divination (2:6), and have found in their wealth a new object of devotion (2:7). They have turned from Yahweh to serve their own idols (2:8). But, most tragic of all, is the pride that accompanies their indifference, and it is here that Isaiah is led to speak of the Day of Yahweh as a day in which every type of pride will be liquidated.

For the Lord of hosts has a day  
 against all that is proud and lofty,  
 against all that is lifted up and high. (2:12)

It is significant, as J. Philip Hyatt has pointed out, that Isaiah's sensitivity to pride leads him to think of all that is exalted in nature, so that the prophet sees the Day of Yahweh embracing even those elements in the natural world which evince thoughts of greatness.<sup>13</sup> It will be a day

against all the cedars of Lebanon,  
 lofty and lifted up;  
 and against all the oaks of Bashan;  
 against all the high mountains,  
 and against all the lofty hills;  
 against every high tower,  
 and against every fortified wall;  
 against all the ships of Tarshish,  
 and against all the beautiful craft. (2:13-16)

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<sup>13</sup>J. Philip Hyatt, Prophetic Religion (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c. 1947), p. 102.

If this is the case, then the Day of Yahweh will be that kind of day on which there will be a final upsetting of pride, a day on which Yahweh Himself is recognized as over all things.

And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,  
and the pride of men shall be brought low;  
and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.  
(2:17)

And those who face the Day of Yahweh will throw their idols to the moles and bats, and will flee to the strongest shelters available, the caves and cliffs (2:20.21). For, when Yahweh comes, He will come in wrath to terrify all the earth before Him (2:21).

In chapter thirteen, the terms again are catastrophic.

The clash of the nations in battle serves as the immediate point from which the prophet views the Day of Yahweh. And, it may be said, that here the unique element in this prophetic concept evidences itself, that though immediately the prophet has in mind the destructive forces of conquest to the extent that the concept is found within the prophecy of Babylon's doom, yet there appears to be something much more final and cataclysmic in his description of the Day of Yahweh.

Wail, for the day of the Lord is near;  
as destruction from the Almighty it will  
come! (13:6)

The Day of Yahweh will be accompanied by tragedy. It will fill men with terror (13:7), and will bring with it the severest kind of pain (13:8). It will be a day on which Yahweh's wrath will be kindled to its utmost, so that there will be nothing short of utter desolation (13:9). And, in terms

that are reminiscent of Amos, it will be a day of darkness rather than light.<sup>14</sup>

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 (13:10).

At the same time, it will be a day affecting nature. The Day of Yahweh will come accompanied by the disruptions of tornado and earthquake.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,  
and the earth will be shaken out of its place (13:13).

As in Amos the Day of Yahweh will call Israel to account, so we can conclude that, for Isaiah, the Day of Yahweh will be a day of judgment first and foremost upon his own people, Judah.<sup>15</sup> The same force of accountability which we found in Amos, is again found in Isaiah. Yahweh's desire is to have a people which worships Him alone, and the Remnant which will survive "the Day" will be just such a kind of people.<sup>16</sup>

As for the other nations of the world, if the observation of R. H. Charles is correct, the idea of a universal judgment is foreign to Isaiah's thought.

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Amos 5:20.

<sup>15</sup>R. H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), pp. 89ff.

<sup>16</sup>The Remnant idea is, of course, essential to Isaiah's prophecy. It would take us too far afield to treat it in detail here, but it must be seen as having a strong bearing upon his concept of the Day of Yahweh.

Judgment, it is true, will be executed on Egypt, Ethiopia, Tyre, Philistia, Moab, and Syria, and all nations will be concerned in Yahwe's purpose of 'breaking Assyria.' These nations, however, are dealt with by the prophet only in relation to his own people.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, Isaiah continues in the same vein as Amos, in making this day a deeply religious one for his own people, and filling it with Yahweh's own content.

### ZEPHANIAH

When Zephaniah began to prophesy, Josiah had just shortly come to the throne.<sup>18</sup> Internally, conditions were in a decadent state. Pagan elements from the worship of Baal and Moloch were grafted into the religious life of Israel. Together with this, the people assimilated foreign customs which were contrary to laws laid down for the community life of Israel. The political leaders, false prophets, and unfaithful priests led the people into indifferentism, and catered to their cravings for material things. It was an age of crass syncretism.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>R. H. Charles, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>Bewer dates Josiah's reign from 637 to 607 B.C. See Julius A. Bewer, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," p. 9. A slight fluctuation of a year should be noted, however. H. W. Robinson dates it from 638 to 608 B.C. See H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making And Meaning (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1937), p. 101. The former places the beginning of Zephaniah's activity about 627-626.

<sup>19</sup>Julius A. Bewer, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," p. 9.

On the outside, the most ominous and disturbing force has been taken by many to be the Scythian invasion.<sup>20</sup> According to Herodotus, they were migrating at this time, and their movement stirred up, in turn, the peoples that had to give way to them.<sup>21</sup> John Punnett Peters has given a noteworthy description of the effect this had on some of the prophets:

The Scythian invasion in the last quarter of the seventh century gave, in the hands of the Prophets, a new meaning and a peculiar coloring to the doctrine of the Day of Yahweh. This new and mysterious nation, coming from the unknown regions of the north, with its wild appearance, its strange and inhuman ways, and its irresistible onset, shaking and overturning all the stable powers of the earth, became to Zephaniah and Jeremiah both the fulfillment and the picture of the day of the judgment of Yahaweh.<sup>22</sup>

These conditions, external and internal, prompt from Zephaniah perhaps the sharpest emphasis found in any of the prophets on the Day of Yahweh.<sup>23</sup> Whether, as H. H. Rowley indicates, Zephaniah accumulates under the phrase "The Day of

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<sup>20</sup>At the same time the disturbance found in the rise of Babylon should be noted.

<sup>21</sup>Bewer, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," p. 9.

<sup>22</sup>John Punnett Peters, op. cit., p. 433.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Sellin, op. cit., p. 140 and Oesterley and Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, p. 402.

Yahweh" all of which the prophets before him spoke,<sup>24</sup> the fact remains that there is something climactic in his employment of the concept.

The phrase "The Day of Yahweh" occurs in 1:7 and 1:14, and in a modified form in 1:18. The prophecy begins with a universal sweep of judgment, which narrows to focus specifically upon Judah. Zephaniah exposes the sin of Judah as lying in her idolatry (1:4.5), and in her consequent indifference toward Yahweh (1:6). As a result, he preaches the proximity of the Day of Yahweh, which is going to be a particularly unique day because Yahweh has prepared it as a Feast Day.

Be silent before the Lord God!  
 For the day of the Lord is at hand;  
 the Lord has prepared a sacrifice  
 and consecrated his guests. (1:7)

It is obvious that the victims who will be consumed at this feast are the people of Judah. Driver draws them together as they are broken down in classes. Included are

court officials, who either aped foreign fashions or were foreigners themselves, and who were addicted to corruption and intrigue; the merchants resident in Jerusalem; and Jews sunk in irreligious indifferentism.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, the "guests" at the feast might be taken to be the Scythians, to whom we have pointed above. In any case, the wailing in the streets of Jerusalem will be

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<sup>24</sup>H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (Second edition; London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup>S. R. Driver, op. cit., p. 341.



unbearable in the Day of Yahweh. Even the mightiest of its men will experience uninhibited terror.

The great day of the Lord is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter,  
the mighty man cries aloud there. (1:14)

For Zephaniah the Day of Yahweh is imminent and dreadful. It is a Dies Irae,<sup>26</sup> and he foretells its gloom in highly descriptive terms.

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,  
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements. (1:15.16)

All of this is to come upon Judah simply because they have become oblivious to their self-identification with Yahweh. And, if that is the case with Yahweh's own people, it holds also for all peoples in general.

I will bring distress on men,  
so that they shall walk like the blind,  
because they have sinned against the Lord. (1:17)

Chapter two bears out this idea of Yahweh's universal concern as it gives a detailed analysis of the judgment as it will be meted out upon peoples outside of Judah. This reaches its climax in a widely expanded description of Yahweh's wrath in chapter three.

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<sup>26</sup>Zephaniah's prophecy of the Day of Yahweh served as the basis for Thomas of Celano's noted Medieval hymn, Dies Irae.

For My decision is to gather nations,  
to assemble kingdoms,  
to pour out upon them My indignation,  
all the heat of My anger;  
for in the fire of My jealous wrath  
all the earth shall be consumed. (3:8)

But, for Zephaniah, the Day of Yahweh does not reach its final expression merely in the wrath of Yahweh. Its ultimate purpose is the survival of a faithful remnant of people, who, in truth, shall serve Yahweh in every way. The idea of a remnant is a significant part of his prophecy, and is important to note for his view of the Day of Yahweh.

For I will leave in the midst of you  
a people humble and lowly.  
They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord,  
those who are left in Israel. (3:12)<sup>27</sup>

The Day of Yahweh in Zephaniah's prophecy takes on an emphatic universal scope.<sup>28</sup> Although Judah is singled out initially, the prophet makes it clear that the judgment of that day faces all the peoples of the world. It is in this that we move somewhat in a different direction from both Amos and Isaiah, for whom the Day of Yahweh was delineated more in terms of their own people.

At the same time, the direction of the prophet is toward

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<sup>27</sup> As in certain sections of Amos, many feel that 3:8-20 is a later addition, giving some note of hope to Zephaniah's otherwise gloomy message. Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bewer, The Literature of the Old Testament, p. 137, and R. H. Charles, op. cit., p. 97.

a thoroughly eschatological emphasis. The Day of Yahweh is less any extraordinary day of Yahweh's work, and more the ultimate day of His activity. It may be noted that this is where the unique character of Zephaniah's prophecy lies.<sup>29</sup> As George Adam Smith remarks, Zephaniah's book "is the first ting-  
ing of prophecy with apocalypse."<sup>30</sup> The distinctive place that he takes up in the line of prophets is well summed up by Sellin:

Das Buch Zephanjas ist von grosser Bedeutung für unsere Kenntniss der Israelitischen Vorstellungen vom Tage Jahwes. Es beweist, dass er schon in vorexilischer Zeit und wiederum auch schon vor jedem Propheten als eine universale Weltkatastrophe aufgefasst wurde, von der weder Israel noch die Natur verschont werden, aus der aber ein gerettetes, neues Gottesvolk hervorgehen soll.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Oesterley and Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, p. 402.

<sup>30</sup>George Adam Smith, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," The Expositor's Bible (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Sellin, op. cit., p. 140.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DAY OF YAHWEH IN EXILIC AND POST-EXILIC PROPHETS

#### EZEKIEL

The prophecy of Ezekiel, son of Buzi, affords a unique vantage point for looking at the Day of Yahweh in the prophets.<sup>1</sup> It is here that we find a prophet who operates not merely with an intuition of imminent danger to himself and his people, but is personally involved in the vicissitudes of captivity. From banishment on the banks of the River Chebar in Babylon, Ezekiel is able to scan the whole flow of historical events in which his people and other nations are caught up, and is moved to speak of the Day of Yahweh as it applies to them. It may be observed that the idea is pertinently real to him and those to whom his message is addressed.<sup>2</sup>

As in Isaiah, Ezekiel's prophecy focuses on the Day of Yahweh particularly in two chapters. We find the idea brought out chiefly in the thirteenth and thirtieth chapters. An investigation of these chapters will allow for certain summarizing remarks regarding his usage of the concept.

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<sup>1</sup>H. W. Robinson holds that Ezekiel prophesied from 592 to at least 570 B. C., after his deportation to Babylon in the year 597 B. C. See H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>The same would hold true of Jeremiah, whom we have not attempted to treat because of the limitations of this study.

In chapter thirteen, Ezekiel turns to the deception of the false prophets. We have seen above that, for Amos, the condemnation is in general against the blatant security of the people. Here Ezekiel turns against Judah's associations of false prophets as being the ones who have led the people into complacency. They are prophets who have spoken devoid of authority, and have consequently plunged the people into a drastic state of affairs.

Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Your prophets have been like foxes among ruins, O Israel. (13:3.4)

The deceptive character of these prophets has affected all that they ever attempted to preach to the people.

Because, yea, because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets daub it with whitewash; say to those who daub it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, great hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind break out; and when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the daubing with which you daubed it?' (13:10-12)

And, as far as the Day of Yahweh is concerned, which seems to imply immediately the destruction of Jerusalem in 586,<sup>3</sup> the false prophets have left the people with little fortification to face it.

You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord. (13:5)

It is significant to note that Ezekiel brings many of the

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, p. 136.

facets of his prophecy within the compass of the individual.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if both Amos and Isaiah can spotlight the Day of Yahweh as being first of all upon Israel and Judah, Ezekiel tends to narrow the circle even more so, and to focus upon specific individuals within Judah. Thus the false prophets are singled out for special judgment at the coming of Yahweh.

Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall, and upon those who have daubed it with whitewash; and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who daubed it, the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, says the Lord God. (13:15.16)

In chapter thirty, on the other hand, we meet the world-embracing scope of the Day of Yahweh.

Wail, 'Alas for the day!  
 For the day is near,  
 the day of the Lord is near;  
 it will be a day of clouds,  
 a time of doom for the nations. (30:3)

Initially, the prophet has in mind the great empire of Egypt, which historically had been a source of discomfort to Israel. But ultimately all nations are included in that judgment which will come amidst the darkness of the Day of Yahweh.

For Ezekiel, in many respects, the Day of Yahweh remains quite the same as for the prophets who preceded him. It will be the day, first of all, of Judah's own judgment, but, in the end, a day of world-upheaval and world-assize. Significantly, however, we find Ezekiel moving away from a collective emphasis

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<sup>4</sup>R. H. Charles has a noteworthy discussion of this emphasis in Ezekiel's thought. See A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, p. 61 ff.

of "the Day" toward a more personalized form. For him, the Day of Yahweh will be that day on which every individual will stand or fall on the basis of the response he has given to Yahweh.

#### OBADIAH

The prophecy of Obadiah, to a large extent, is a delineation of what Yahweh would mete out upon the supercilious people of Edom.<sup>5</sup> With the shame and dismay Judah was forced to endure in such tragedies as the Babylonian Captivity, Edom offered little sympathy. Contrariwise, her attitude was one of rebuff. She surreptitiously concurred in the desolation inflicted upon her neighbors to the northwest.

Edom's attitude had its basis in the long histories of the two peoples. The feeling between the two was consistently acrimonious.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, the problem of dating the book of Obadiah is a secondary one, for the primary concern is that, in this prophecy, the long-existent rancor between the two peoples is brought to a climax. All that, perhaps, went unwritten and unsaid in the long course of Judah's history, is here emitted, and the prophecy serves as a sort of funnel

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<sup>5</sup>The problem of dating the prophecy of Obadiah prompts one to act mostly on the basis of assumption. Thus we have taken the liberty of following those scholars who place it at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The dating is not really essential to this study, as is pointed out.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21 f; Ezek. 25:12-14; Ezek. 35:1 f; Is. 34:5 ff.; Is. 63:1-6.

for all the feelings that took form prior to Obadiah.

The concept of the Day of Yahweh appears in verse fifteen. If the integrity of the book remains unchallenged,<sup>7</sup> it serves as the focal point of the prophecy against Edom. At the same time, it is apparent that, with this verse, the prophecy turns beyond the borders of Edom to the nations as a whole.

For the day of the Lord is near upon  
all the nations.  
As you have done, it shall be done to you,  
your deeds shall return on your own head. (v. 15)

The idea that judgment shall be spelled out upon all those nations who had ever satiated their appetite of conquest upon Judah is essential to the latter part of Obadiah's prophecy.

For as you have drunk upon My holy mountain,  
all the nations round about shall drink;  
they shall drink, and stagger,  
and shall be as though they had not been. (v. 16)

But, the prophecy ends with a positive note. A strong promise of deliverance faces the people of Judah and bolsters them in the day of their tragedy.

But in Mount Zion there shall be those that escape,  
and it shall be holy;  
and the house of Jacob shall possess their  
own possessions. (v. 17)

The fact that the prophecy of Obadiah ends on the note of Judah's ultimate victory over her enemies would lead one to believe that it marks a return to the earlier popular concept,

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<sup>7</sup>verses 15-21 are taken by many to be such a shift in thought as to indicate a later date for their compilation. See H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p. 119, and Sellin, op. cit., p. 129.



which we have reviewed above. In this the motif would tend to be more nationalistic. It is apparent that there are verses which would elicit such an observation toward the close of the prophecy.<sup>8</sup> Judah is pictured as taking over the land of Edom in strict fulfillment of the law of retribution found in verse fifteen.

But, if such an observation would stand or not, we have in the prophecy of Obadiah, in any case, a departure from what we have found in the other prophets we have treated thus far. There is seemingly no attempt, on the part of Obadiah, to turn the searchlight of Yahweh's judgment upon Judah herself. Rather, the Day of Yahweh will be that day on which the same sort of distress with which the heathen nations have afflicted His people, will be proportionately meted out upon them. The closest point of contact with the prophets who preceded him is to be found in the world-wide scope of "the Day." It will be a day involving all the nations. At the same time, the sense still permeates the wide scope, that the nations will be judged because of their cruelty to Judah, and that the latter be victorious above them all.

#### JOEL

It is not possible, with any final amount of exactitude,

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. 18 ff.

to determine the date of Joel's prophecy.<sup>9</sup> For this reason it is simultaneously difficult to speak of any external circumstances, outside of those recorded in the book itself, which the prophet may have been forced to undergo. Whatever may have been the factors prompting the prophecy must be assumed on the basis of the internal evidence of the book itself.

It becomes apparent upon approaching his prophecy, that Joel, together with his people, had experienced a devastating invasion of locusts.<sup>10</sup> This tragic plague heightened his sensitivity to some sort of approaching doom, which both he and his people would be constrained to face. It took a slight adjustment in thought to move from the destruction of this plague to the widespread desolation which would accompany the Day of Yahweh.

Alas for the day!

For the day of the Lord is near,  
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. (1:15)

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<sup>9</sup>The reasons advanced by many for putting Joel after the Exile seem substantial enough for warranting its being placed at this point in this study. For a concise analysis of these reasons see H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p. 124 f. Sellin lists the leading scholars who stand for a late or an early date. See Sellin, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>10</sup>It is our view that the historical interpretation of the plague is the correct one. According to Peters, the unique fact that the prophecy of Joel is called forth not by any world movements, but rather by the locust plague, is indicative of its being written later toward the Persian period, when there was, in the main, peace and quiet. See John Punnett Peters, op. cit., p. 373.

It is significant to note that, in the first part of Joel's prophecy, his anticipations lie mostly with his own people. Because of the imminence of the Day of Yahweh, he is extremely intent that they should apply themselves to every kind of preparation. He appropriately calls for the religious activities of the cultus to be set in operation.

Sanctify a fast,  
 call a solemn assembly.  
 Gather the elders  
 and all the inhabitants of the land  
 to the house of the Lord your God;  
 and cry to the Lord. (1:14)

Conjointly, the instruments employed in the cultus should herald the proximity of "the Day."

Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain.  
 Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
 for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near. (2:1)

The nearness of the Day of Yahweh calls for the concern of every individual, regardless of status.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
 and the bride her chamber. (2:16)

As for the day itself, Joel depicts it much in the same terms as the prophets before him. It will be

a day of darkness and gloom,  
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
 Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
 a great and powerful people;  
 their like has never been from of old,  
 nor will be again after them  
 through the years of all generations. (2:3)

Who this mysterious army is that spreads desolation in the Day of Yahweh is unknown. But it is certain from the

prophecy that it spares nothing in destruction, and that it will be the agent of Yahweh's punitive activity.

The earth quakes before them,  
 the heavens tremble.  
 The sun and the moon are darkened,  
 and the stars withdraw their shining.  
 The Lord utters His voice  
 before His army,  
 for His host is exceedingly great;  
 He that executes His word is powerful.  
 For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible;  
 who can endure it? (2:10.11)

As for his own people, then, Joel is greatly concerned that, before all of this, they repent and seek the mercy of Yahweh. For it is in Yahweh's nature to bestow mercy.

Return to the Lord, your God,  
 for He is gracious and merciful,  
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,  
 and repents of evil. (2:13)

And Yahweh will have mercy, and will wipe out the agent of His judgment for His people's sake.

I will remove the northerner far from you,  
 and drive him into a parched and desolate land,  
 his front into the eastern sea,  
 and his rear into the western sea;  
 the stench and foul smell of him will rise. (2:20)

We find, thus, in Joel, a strong emphasis on the hope of Yahweh's people before the terrible day. Their hope lies in repentance and in casting themselves prostrate before His mercy. Yahweh will not act capriciously "in that day," but those that seek Him shall find Him, and shall be spared. That they might anticipate and know the time of His coming, Joel points to the "outpouring of the Spirit" as a concomitant of the coming of Yahweh.

And it shall come to pass afterward,  
 that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
 your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 your old men shall dream dreams,  
 and your young men shall see visions.  
 Even upon the menservants and maidservants  
 in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (2:28.29)

At the same time, the disturbed movements in the heavens will indicate His approaching day.

And I will give portents 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 terrible day of the Lord comes. (2:30.31)

In chapter three the coloring becomes distinctly apocalyptic.<sup>11</sup> The reach of the Day of Yahweh spreads beyond Judah to the nations as a whole. All nations will be assembled for judgment in the great Valley of Jehoshaphat, a name which designates the type of activity that will take place there. Here the nations needs must be summoned to face the wrath of Yahweh.

For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of My people and My heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up My land, and have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it. (3:1-3)

It will be a time of indescribable crisis for the nations.

Multitudes, multitudes,  
 in the valley of decision!

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<sup>11</sup>According to Oesterley and Robinson, the apocalyptic sections in Joel are 1:15; 2:1-11; 2:28-32; 3:1-21. See An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, p. 356.

For the day of the Lord is near  
 in the valley of decision.  
 The sun and the moon are darkened,  
 and the stars withdraw their shining. (3:14.15)

But for his own people, the Day of Yahweh will be a day of their ultimate deliverance. And here again, apocalyptic strains break through to describe the promise that is held out to them.

And in that day  
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
 and the hills shall flow with milk,  
 and all the stream beds of Judah  
 shall flow with water;  
 and a fountain shall come forth from  
 the house of the Lord  
 and water the valley of Shittim. (3:18)

For Joel, then, the Day of Yahweh appears in deeply catastrophic terms. His apocalyptic descriptions of both the cataclysmic disruptions and the ultimate deliverance of "that Day," are unique to his prophecy.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it will be a day calling for a response from Yahweh's own people, as well as from the nations of the world. It will be a day before which the people must cast themselves in utter reliance upon Yahweh's goodness. And, for the heathen nations, it will be a day on which they are congregated to hear the verdict of Yahweh pronounced upon the meaning of their history. And, from it all, will issue forth His own people, the remnant, purified and refined.

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<sup>12</sup>See T. H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel, pp. 193 ff., for a noteworthy discussion of the varied elements involved in the difference between Apocalyptic and Prophecy.

This latter note is uniquely depicted by Joel. His prophecy is replete with the fulfillment of this ultimate purpose. The Day of Yahweh will be that day on which Israel will experience the culmination of her deliverance. Although it will be a day of upheaval, yet it will be one "through which the children of Zion shall come to see ease and plenty, to experience the outpouring upon them of the spirit of God, and to be joined by their brethren of the dispersion."<sup>13</sup>

#### MALACHI

The prophet Malachi rose to meet a critical situation.<sup>14</sup> The Jews had returned from captivity, and had set about the task of reconstruction. In the course of rebuilding their homes and the temple, they met with circumstances which dampened their initial concern. They experienced locust plagues, failure of crops, in addition to the unkindness of the people who had never been taken along in the Babylonian deportations. Their confidence in Yahweh dwindled, and ultimately gave way to a lack of reverence for Him.<sup>15</sup> All of this prompted Malachi to accumulate the greater part of his message under

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<sup>13</sup>H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>Bewer places Malachi's prophecy about 460 B.C. See Julius A. Bewer, "The Book of the Twelve Prophets Volume II," p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

the preaching of the Day of Yahweh.

Internally, these conditions infected the very structure of the community life. The prophet points, first of all, to the priests as precursors of rampant indifference.

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise My name. (1:6)

The indifference of the priests had a telling effect upon the people, whom they were supposedly to lead. The people tended to drift into a lack of concern for each other, which reached heightened expression in the indifference toward the solidarity of the marital relationship.

Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our father? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. (2:10.11)

Again their lack of reverence is pointed up in the niggardly attitude toward tithing.

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, 'How are we robbing Thee?' In your tithes and offerings. (3:8)

The Day of the Lord, in view of all of this, is found within the context of a sharpened admonition. The great need of preparation is distinctly within the prophet's mind, for the Day of Yahweh and all that it involves is dreadfully near.

For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be



stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. (4:1)

It will be a day of indictment and remuneration. It, therefore, calls for a serious response from the people. Malachi delineates this response primarily in Levitical terms.

Remember the law of My servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. (4:4)

It is important to note that, in Malachi, the Day of Yahweh is found within the framework of the coming Messianic Age.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the Day of Yahweh, there will arise one who will lead the people in their preparation, and the coming of this one will be an act of Yahweh's grace.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord 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)

This prophecy thus lends itself as an appropriate point at which to bring to a close our investigation of the Day of Yahweh, as it is employed by various of the prophets. With Malachi's announcement of the "coming Elijah," whom Jesus later

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<sup>16</sup>The relationship of the Day of Yahweh to the Messianic expectation would lend itself to fruitful study. Cf. Briggs' comment, "We have seen that Messianic prophecy has two lines of development which run parallel with each other, and never coincide under the Old Testament;--the advent of Yahweh and the advent of the seed of the woman, who is also the seed of Abraham and the seed of David." G. A. Briggs, Messianic Prophecy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 156.

identifies with John the Baptist,<sup>17</sup> it forms an important transition from the prophetic writings to the New Testament and its further usage of the concept. For Malachi, the Day of Yahweh links up with the Messianic promise, to give Israel confidence in her preparation for Yahweh's coming. In all seriousness, it will be a time of refinement, a time when Israel is tested and tried, until the purified element issues forth to face expectantly the Day of Yahweh. As we turn, in our final chapter, to concern ourselves with the theological aspects of "the Day," Malachi leads us to see this prophetic expectation as it joins itself to the Messianic hope.

Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord. (3:1-3)

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Mk. 9:11-13; Mt. 11:14; Lk. 1:17.

## CHAPTER V

### THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE DAY OF YAHWEH

We turn, in this final chapter, to the task of synthesizing some of the observations we have made. We have attempted, thus far, to form some sort of link with the prophetic writings, and have looked at those prophets who most prominently employ the concept in its formalized pattern. It remains for us to bring together various facets which will accordingly result in a general synthesis of the prophetic idea of the Day of Yahweh.

So far we have had no opportunity to concern ourselves with the basic concept of time, as it was viewed by the Hebrews. Since the word Yom is intimately involved in the idea of a Day of Yahweh, it is of importance that we note the various shadings of its usage, particularly as this sheds light upon this concept. This will lead us to a more involved concern with the content of "the Day," and also of the prophetic view of eschatology.

Time, for the Hebrews, was primarily functional. It was never thought of in abstracto, but was always conceived of in terms of events which happened or were going to happen on a given day. Time was never divorced from their life and history. Conjointly, their conception of time was always related to Yahweh Himself. This is particularly forceful in the word Yom. For the Hebrews, Yom had its origin in Creation. It was

here that Yahweh took it upon Himself to separate light from darkness, and to establish Yom.<sup>1</sup> So, in history, and chiefly in their own covenant history, the Hebrews were wont to look at Yahweh as the originator and Lord of every day.

Ladislav Cerny has set down the findings of his detailed analysis of the Hebraic conception of Yom with its many-sided shadings.<sup>2</sup> His study indicates that the word Yom, in many cases, is related to a proper name or pronoun, to the extent that the "quality of the content" of any particular day is affected by these.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for example, in Isaiah 9:3, the "day of Midian," and in Hosea 2:2, the "day of Jezreel," are days in which the kind of content that will fill them is indicated by the proper name with which they are associated.<sup>4</sup>

In similar manner, the Day of Yahweh is to be viewed "as one indefinite day in the future without anything being determined either as to its duration or as to its particular connection with the definite number of days in the year, but originally with its definite content most probably clearly

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard von Rad, "ἡμέρα," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Zweiter Band; Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1935), II, 945-949.

<sup>2</sup>Ladislav Cerny, op. cit., pp. 1-26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

defined."<sup>5</sup>

The usage of Yom in the Day of Yahweh is, accordingly, not an attempt upon the part of the prophets to indicate any specific period of calendar time, but rather to point to what they felt the content of that day would be in terms of what they knew concerning the activity of Yahweh. It would depend on what they believed Yahweh would be doing on that day.<sup>6</sup> A. B. Davidson sums up the peculiar character of this day.

It is a day that is a special time; and it is the day of the Lord, belongs to Him, is His time for working, for manifesting Himself, for displaying His character, for performing His work--His strange work upon the earth.<sup>7</sup>

This leads us to the problem of the extent to which the Day of Yahweh is taken by the prophets to be a day within the sphere of history, and the extent to which it becomes decisively eschatological. It is apparent, at the outset, that this is of decided importance in attempting to understand the content of the Day of Yahweh.

Heinisch points out that the phrase, "The Day of Yahweh," "at times indicated judgment upon a specific people, at other times a series of judgments inflicted by Yahweh,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>J. E. Fison, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>7</sup>A. B. Davidson, op. cit., p. 374.

again at other times the final judgment at the end of the world.<sup>8</sup> From our investigation of individual prophets in the chapters above, we are able to conclude that the historical unfolding of this day was pointed in their minds. Thus, for example, the wrath and judgment of the Day of Yahweh is frequently sensed as being conveyed through some historical agent, acting in the role Yahweh has designated for him.

At the same time, the reach appears to be toward the end of history and the final judgment, which would be consummated in the Day of Yahweh. The cataclysmic nature of the Day of Yahweh indicates a note of finality. As we shall point to the dual thread involved in the judgment-promise aspects of "the Day," it might be observed that here, too, we are confronted with a double-sided description, a description which immediately appropriates itself to any extraordinary upheaval in the flow of history, but ultimately fulfills itself in the finality of eschatology. Thus, the prophets could, in any events that struck them as being something more than ordinary, identify certain elements of them with the Day of Yahweh. But, at the same time, they could look beyond them to the more inexplicable and drastic. The Day of Yahweh remained for them essentially within the sphere of eschatology.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by William Heidt (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey, c. 1950), p. 270.

<sup>9</sup>A. B. Davidson, "Eschatology," A Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), I, 736.

This dual aspect we might term the immediate-ultimate thread running through the prophetic expectation of the Day of Yahweh.

If the Day of Yahweh, then, appears to be both immediate and consummate in the prophets, it remains for us to look more closely at the nature of "the Day" and its content. This has been an object of profound concern upon the part of Old Testament scholars, and the literature on the subject is prolific.<sup>10</sup>

The Day of Yahweh, as we have indicated in our second and third chapters, is a common point at which the prophets congregate. Although we specifically limited our treatment to those who employ the formalized phrase, "The Day of Yahweh," it is to be noted that the same theme permeates other prophets who do not use it. The Day of Yahweh becomes the point at which all the prophets tend to interpret the destiny of Israel and the nations of the world. In the words of C. H. Dodd, "Whatever events the Old Testament prophets may indicate as impending, these events are for them significant as elements in the coming of 'the Day of the Lord.'"<sup>11</sup>

Conjointly, we have observed in our first chapter, that

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Cerny, op. cit., pp. 27-52, and H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, pp. 138-143 for general overview of the significant contributions on this subject.

<sup>11</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1936), p. 13.

the idea of the Day of Yahweh was existent in the popular mind prior to the prophets. / It remained for the latter, however, to set it in the sphere of ethics and to give it universal bearing.<sup>12</sup> For the prophets it became a decidedly theocentric concept, to be viewed from Yahweh's own point of view, and to be interpreted in terms of how His will would manifest itself on "that Day."

This is the point at which we must concern ourselves with the content of the Day of Yahweh. The problem is the extent to which Yahweh's will would appear to be that of judgment or deliverance "in His day." This problem, of course, is accentuated in proportion to the amount of criticism accepted in regard to those sections of the prophetic literature which are under question.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the problem remains as one to be resolved in any concern with this concept.

The Day of Yahweh is taken by many to be essentially a day of doom and judgment. Initially, we might say, this observation would appear to have some warrant. From our treatment of the prophets above, we are led to believe that some are more emphatic in their descriptions of doom and less so in their depictions of deliverance, whereas, for others, the

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<sup>12</sup>R. H. Charles, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>13</sup>We have indicated, at several points, the fact that many of the hope sections in the prophets are considered to be suspect by certain scholars.



inverse holds true.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have even been led to observe that the Day of Yahweh in the pre-exilic prophets was more a day of judgment, while to the exilic and post-exilic prophets, it took on more of the promise aspects.<sup>15</sup>

And yet, though in some of the prophets we have considered the note of deliverance would seem to be less prominent, in the larger context it always appears to manifest itself. This would seem to be the case, even where every allowance is made for the possibility of emendations and appendages. H. Wheeler Robinson has made the significant observation, which we note here in part.

The emphasis of the pre-exilic prophets falls on sin and judgment, but the ideas of grace and salvation are almost always present, even where we have fully allowed for later additions under this head. The very threat of punishment is implicitly a call for repentance and an opportunity for it. There is to be a happy future for the righteous, because penitent and sifted, remnant.<sup>16</sup>

That both judgment and deliverance aspects recur in the prophetic description of the Day of Yahweh, would lend support to the observation made in the first chapter, that es-

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<sup>14</sup>If, for example, the prophecies of Amos and Joel are set side by side, the contrast becomes apparent in this very respect. An even greater contrast would appear if Obadiah were set next to Amos.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. R. H. Charles, op. cit., p. 101, and J. M. P. Smith, "The Day of Yahweh," p. 518.

<sup>16</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p.128.

essentially the "Yahweh of old" is the same Yahweh who is pictured as coming "in that Day." Even as, in pre-prophetic history, He is depicted as a God who both judges and delivers, so also in the prophets, we meet Him in the same manner.

The dual thread of the Day of Yahweh thus seems to be the best explanation of His activity "in that Day." For the prophets, He will come both to judge and to deliver. And yet, the latter will not be capriciously dispensed. If there is to be deliverance, it will be stringently within the framework of personal accountability. Deliverance will be meted out upon the righteous, and only them. The arousal to repentance, in the face of judgment, is an essential facet of prophetic preaching. For the righteous, the Day of Yahweh will be "a day of salvation through judgment."<sup>17</sup> They, together with all others, will face the drastic nature of "the Day," but their deliverance will come to fruition "on its other side." Thus, the hope that is held out before Yahweh's people, is not a hope divorced from Yahweh's own purpose and will. It is not a hope that fosters complacency. The hope of the Day of Yahweh is a hope "which is willing to face the terrors of His coming for that which shall follow upon it."<sup>18</sup>

It is significant to note the complements the various prophets use in connection with the Day of Yahweh. A wide

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<sup>17</sup>A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, p. 377.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

spread of terms are used to characterize the extremely unique aspects of "the Day."<sup>19</sup> General descriptions picture it as a great and terrible day. Astronomical and other terms related to the natural order depict the upheaval that will accompany it. Psychological terms describe the emotion of Yahweh, and social and cultic terms indicate its extent. All of this, of course, would serve to substantiate the observation that it is a concept that attracted the prophets as a whole. It is a point at which the prophets achieve a unitive experience, a point at which their theology aggregates under a common expectation.

But the point must be made emphatically, to do justice to the prophets, that they did not speak of the Day of Yahweh apart from the course of history itself. To a certain extent, their prophecy must be viewed from the standpoint of a Sitz im Leben. It was not detached from the events which Israel was seeing transpire before her eyes.

Prophecy never lived and thrived in a vacuum; it had to have something to interpret. It found God, but it found Him in the course of actual events; it was stirred to utterance by them, and was never born of isolation and detachment from them.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, when there occurred before them a "quickening of the

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<sup>19</sup>For a useful table illustrating the various descriptive complements, see the Appendix in Cerny, op. cit., p.p. 106-107.

<sup>20</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning, p. 85.

currents of providence in any direction, whether of judgment or salvation, the presentiment filled their minds that it was the beginning of the day of the Lord."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the strongest complement suggested by the prophets to the Day of Yahweh is, therefore, its proximity. Always, "the Day" for them is dreadfully near. This may be explainable not so much by any crass observations regarding the personalities of the prophets, as by the very nature of prophecy itself. Prophecy was to depict the activity of Yahweh toward His people as this would unfold itself in the future. It was, consequently, in the very nature of prophecy to identify itself with that which was pressing toward fulfillment. Nothing in prophecy was far removed from the point at which prophecy was made. The use of the "prophetic perfect" serves to indicate the intensity of this characteristic of prophecy. H. Wheeler Robinson remarks: "Thought is always pressing into action, and finds its expression most naturally for the Hebrew in the contemplation of the act as already performed."<sup>22</sup>

We have, therefore, in the Day of Yahweh, a most fruitful expectation. It is a reality which the prophets kept alive for their own people and the heathen nations of the world.

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<sup>21</sup>A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, p. 379.

<sup>22</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament, p. 137.

In a sense, it may be said that the prophecy fulfilled itself immediately at certain catastrophic points in Israel's history. But not finally. The eschatological aspects of the Day of Yahweh recur at certain points in the New Testament. The Church, to remain true to every facet of her task, must be about the business of making perpetual preparation for "the Day." It faces her alike with prophetic seriousness. Her message is to recount its imminence and scope, and to reiterate for her members the expectation of the Apostle Paul:

But as far as times and seasons go, my brothers, you don't need written instructions. You are well aware that the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a burglary to a householder. When men are saying "Peace and security" catastrophe will sweep down upon them as suddenly and inescapably as birthpangs to a pregnant woman.

But because you, my brothers, are not living in darkness the Day cannot take you completely by surprise. After all, burglary only takes place at night! You are all sons of light, sons of the day, and none of us belong to darkness or the night. Let us then never fall into the sleep that stupefies the rest of the world; let us keep awake with our wits about us. Night is the time for sleep and the time when men get drunk, but we men of the daylight should be alert, with faith and love as our breastplate and the hope of our salvation as our helmet. (I Thess. 5:1-8)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>J. B. Phillips, Letters To Young Churches (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 137.

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