

The Day of the Lord!

Isaiah 13:1-13
February 17, 2008
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Are you aware of *the day of the Lord*? Do you know what it means? The Bible cannot be understood, nor the ministry or teaching of Jesus and his apostles without understanding the day of the Lord. Over 300 times in the New Testament alone, the day of the Lord or one of its components is mentioned. Jesus' famed Sermon on the Mount makes sense only if you are preparing for the day of the Lord. Many of his parables anticipate the day of the Lord.

The apostles expected the day of the Lord to arrive soon. Paul uses the term *the day of the Lord* in four of his letters (1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Corinthians 1:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, and 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Peter writes that it arrives like a thief, involves judgment, promises renewal, calls for holy lives and can be sped along by our actions (2 Peter 3:10). I can't offer a full picture of the day of the Lord in so few minutes, but a few scriptures can get us started.

Turn to Acts, chapter 2, verse 16 (page 836). On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came on those first believers, Peter explained what happened, quoting the prophet Joel:

“In the last days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:16-21, NIV)

Peter taught that the gift of the Holy Spirit is preparation for the day of the Lord! The church was born at Pentecost to prepare you, me and the entire world for the day of the Lord. As a church we are to prepare ourselves, others and our communities for the day of the Lord.

Exactly what are we to prepare for? Turn to Isaiah 13, (pages 544 and 545 in the pew Bible). In verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah 13, God calls an army to destroy Babylon. In verses 4 and 5, the prophecy turns from Babylon to the entire world. God calls for armies from many nations to be weapons of judgment.

Do you remember pre-war Iraq? Do you remember Saddam Hussein gassing the Kurds and his cat-and-mouse game with the United Nations over weapons of mass destruction? Do you remember how vulnerable we Americans felt after terrorists hijacked four planes, toppled two towers and incinerated part of the Pentagon? Have you ever thought that the United States was an instrument of divine judgment on Iraq? I'm not justifying or condemning a decision of our government. I'm not commenting on the morality or consequences of our choices. I'm not saying that our leaders or soldiers are just. I'm not contending that America is righteous or that our decisions and actions are wise. I'm not saying that God favors us over other nations. God is impartial. Indeed, our painful losses in war suggest that we too experience God's judgment. My purpose is to help you see your life, your time and your world spiritually rather than politically. I'm not talking politics. I'm talking God, and he tells us through the Bible that he is involved in our world and doing a lot more among us unbelieving people than we perceive. Do you see that in verses 6, 7 and 8 people suffer great terror from the armies that God uses as his weapons?

Now let's read verses 9 through 11 to see its purposes:

For see, the day of the Lord is coming—the terrible day of his fury and fierce anger. The land will be made desolate, and all the sinners destroyed with it. The heavens will be black above them; the stars will give no light. The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will provide no light.

“I, the Lord, will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sin.”
(Isaiah 13:9-11, NIV)

God executes his judgment on the day of the Lord, and the old order of things comes to an end. Before the prophet turns his attention once again to Babylon, God speaks through him in verse 13, that he will shake the heavens, and the earth will move from its place.

Is God talking astronomy? Does the earth move from its orbit? Perhaps, but more likely we are talking spirituality. The angels of heaven are shaken in judgment and the world is no longer subject to the rebellious ones. That is explicit in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles.

Turn now to Joel 3 (pages 692 and 693). From the prophet Joel, we learn that the day of the Lord is not just destruction of the sinful. It is also deliverance of the righteous. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2 to explain the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we read further in Joel, we realize that Joel prophesies the restoration of Israel. In verse 14 he declares:

For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. "Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her." (Joel 3:14-17, NIV)

Do you realize that judgment of an oppressor is deliverance for the oppressed? Our sins oppress the world. They oppress people. They oppress nature. God loves the world. God loves people. God loves nature. Our sins offend God whose love burns like fire. God's love burns like a fire for those we hurt, and God's holy love burns like a fire for us. Even evil words incur such great anger that Jesus warns that whoever calls someone a fool is in danger from the fires of hell (Matthew 5:22).

Thus, the day of the Lord is about God's deliverance of the oppressed. All who are oppressed by sin and death look forward to that day. Christian peoples, who suffer greatly for the gospel, long for the day. Individuals and communities look forward to the day. Yet, all who oppress with sin should fear that day.

Another prophet helps us. Turn to Ezekiel 13 (page 636). This prophet speaks of a wall protecting God's people. In ancient cities, a wall provided protection from enemies. With a wall a city could flourish despite the strength of its enemies. People could live in security and prosper. They could taste the fruit of their work. However, if the wall was broken and there was a gap, the weakest enemy could enter and take them captive. In the book of Job, there is a wall or hedge around Job and his family so that the devil can't touch them. The devil can't attack them with weather, disease, or armies. The Bible shows Job and his family prospering and Satan frustrated by the wall because he can't spiritually or physically attack Job.

Unfortunately, there are breaks in the wall protecting Israel. The prophets are whitewashing sin. Ezekiel in verse 5 confronts these spiritual leaders, saying:

You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the Lord. (Ezekiel 13:5, NIV)

Ezekiel is not talking of a physical wall. He is referring to the same spiritual wall that protected Job. It's a wall of obedience to God's word. It is a wall that allows God to shower his people with favor. The wall is erected not merely by the covenant, but by people living in covenant with God. The Bible teaches that God gave us his Spirit so that we now can actually live in covenant and be blessed, especially on the day of the Lord.

What then shall we conclude from these few scriptures on the day of the Lord? *First, God is no household idol.* He is the creator, ruler and judge of all: all nations, all individuals, all angels, all critters, all lands, all waters, and all dimensions. *Second, God is passionate with fiery love and justice.* He hates evil for what it does; and therefore, all evildoers and all evil deeds will be judged by him. He uses nations and individuals as weapons of justice; yet each weapon is also judged. *Third, God's desire to destroy evil is in service of his desire to deliver.* The day

of the Lord is a day of deliverance. It is the day of Jesus' return. It is the day when freedom from evil and death will be granted because God will judge evil and death and destroy them. That is why there is a need for repentance and faith, so that we experience deliverance rather than be destroyed with evil. *Fourth, God both promises and gives his Spirit to all who repent and believe.* The Spirit can come into us because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ, so that we are delivered rather than judged, and so that all believers become prophets who prepare the world for the day of the Lord.

Are you prepared for the day of the Lord? If not, the first step is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ which includes fellowship in his church. If you are prepared, then how are you preparing your family, community and world for this approaching day? This is the call to which each believer must give an account?