



# Day of the Lord

## STUDY NOTES



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## What is the Day of the Lord?

The Day of the Lord is a phrase used in the Bible to describe how God is at work in history to confront collective human evil, liberate his people from oppression, and assert his rule over all creation.

## Rebellion from the Garden to Babylon

**Genesis 3-11 traces the theme of humanity's spreading rebellion and the violence and disaster that results.**

Humans first rebel in the garden by redefining good and evil on their own terms. The book of Genesis recounts the consequences in the following chapters. In chapter 3, Adam and Eve distrust each other, and they "hide" from each other and from God. In chapter 4, Cain's jealousy leads to murder, and his city is characterized by the violent and abusive Lamech. In chapter 6, the "Sons of God" take interest in human women, which leads to more violence. Finally, the tracing of this theme culminates with the rebellion at Babylon, or the Tower of Babel.

- Babel is Babylon. Although ancient Babylon was powerful, it was not an empire. Genesis depicts ancient Babylon in terms of what it will become in world history and in Israel's story. Genesis 11 is preparing for Israel's exile to Babylon in 2 Kings 24-25.
- The tower is representative of humanity's first unified attempt to assert its divine authority through technology and temple building (brick and tar).
- In the Bible, Babylon and its mythology becomes an archetype of humanity in rebellion against the one true God and the resulting violence and injustice.

What is God going to do? Who's going to hold Babylon accountable?

### NOTE:

Babylon has roots in mythology surrounding the god, Marduk. He was the patron of the city of Babylon and the son of the chief of gods. When the Neo-Babylonian empire rose as a world empire in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., the myth developed in the *Enuma Elish*. According to this myth, Marduk defeats the forces of chaos and ascends to the throne of the high god.



## Egypt Becomes the New Babylon

### 1 | In Genesis 11-12, God calls one family out of the scattering of Babylon and promises to restore divine blessing to all nations through this particular family.

But how? The family grows larger and ends up in Egypt. Initially things are going well, but then Exodus happens.

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more numerous and mightier than us. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply, and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us and fight against us and depart from the land.

So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.

EXODUS 1:8-14

At this point, Egypt has become Babylon. Their cities and 'brick and mortar' are built on the blood of the innocent. Egypt has redefined good and evil, so that murdering children and enslaving immigrants is seen as good. The story diagnoses this "evil" as refusing to acknowledge Yahweh as the one true God.

NOTE

In Exodus 5:2, Pharaoh says, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I don't know (acknowledge) Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go."

### 2 | God's justice is brought upon Egypt in the ten plagues, culminating in the death of the firstborn and the defeat of Pharaoh by the Sea of Reeds.

The defeat of Egypt/Babylon's evil and the liberation of his enslaved people is the first Day of the Lord.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant, Moses.

EXODUS 14:30-31

This day is memorialized in the feast of Passover.

Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the Lord brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten.

EXODUS 13:3



The first praise song in the Bible celebrates God's victory over evil and the Day of the Lord. It concludes by linking together the ideas of the Day of the Lord with God's defeat of evil and his reign as king.

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and said,  
"I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted;  
the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and song,  
and He has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise Him;  
my father's God, and I will extol Him.  
The Lord is a warrior;  
the Lord is His name.

EXODUS 15:1-3

You will bring the people you have purchased  
and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance,  
the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your dwelling,  
the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.  
The Lord reigns as king forever and ever.

EXODUS 15:17-18

The stories of Babylon and the Exodus became the archetype for how God confronts human evil in scripture. If an empire doesn't submit itself to God's rule and liberate the oppressed, God will orchestrate events to bring about its downfall and replace it with his own kingdom.

## Israel Becomes Babylon

### As it grows, Israel becomes wealthy, apathetic, unjust, and idolatrous.

They take their status for granted and assume that their God will always be for them and against their enemies. The story of King Solomon in 1 Kings is where this becomes apparent.

Solomon's reign is divided into three parts.

#### Part 1: Promising beginnings and successes

1 KINGS 1-3

- David charges Solomon to follow the commands of the Torah.
- Solomon asks God for "a heart that listens, to rule your people, to discern between good and evil."
- God honors his request and rewards Solomon with wealth and kavod.

#### Part 2: Wealth, honor, and building projects

1 KINGS 4-10

- Solomon's kingdom starts to look more and more like Egypt/Babylon.
- He spends seven years building the temple with slave labor and fourteen years building his own palace.
- Solomon marries Pharaoh's daughter and accepts her dowry: the Canaanite city of Gezer, which the pharaoh had burned and cleared.

- Solomon imports six hundred sixty-six talents of gold per year. Five hundred gold shields hang in his palace above a huge throne of ivory surrounded by twelve lions. He imports gold, silver, ivory, apes, peacocks, and fourteen hundred chariots and horses from Egypt.

**NOTE**  
This is all contrary to the laws of the Israelite kings in Deuteronomy 17.

### Part 3: Idolatry, rebellion, and the fall of this “Babylon”

**1 KINGS 11**

- Solomon accumulates seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, a combination of political alliances and marriages.
- He gives allegiance to the gods Asherah, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech.
- God allows Israel’s enemies to overtake their land. The unified kingdom of David is split into tribal states of Israelites, which are then picked off slowly over the next two hundred and fifty years.

## The Day of the Lord Brings the Downfall of Every Babylon

**Once Israel becomes like Babylon and Egypt, they become the target of the Day of the Lord .**

Amos reverses Israel’s expectations about the Day of the Lord.

Woe to you who long  
for the Day of the Lord!  
Why do you long for the Day of the Lord?  
That day will be darkness, not light.

**AMOS 5:18**

He goes on to explain why citing Israel’s injustice, abuse of the poor, idolatry, and neglect of the laws of the Torah. He warns of a great oppressing army who will conquer Israel and take them into exile. Habakkuk tells of who that army will be.

Look among the nations! Observe!  
Be astonished! Wonder!  
Because I am doing something in your days—  
you would not believe if you were told.  
For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,\*  
that fierce and impetuous people  
who march throughout the earth  
to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.

**\*THE BABYLONIANS**

**HABAKKUK 1:5-6**

God is going to bring the Day of the Lord on Israel-become-Babylon by allowing the actual Babylon to defeat them. The Day of the Lord is allowing the nations to rise and fall by their own greed and evil one after the other in a sequence of self-destruction.

Habakkuk is concerned about this, so God gives him a vision of the end of the whole cycle in Habakkuk 2. In this chapter, God decrees a limit to human evil. The final poem in chapter 3 describes a day when God will confront Babylon and defeat its evil. It’s a poetic retelling of Egypt’s defeat at the Red Sea, but it’s even more extreme. Habakkuk calls it a “day of distress.”

**HABAKKUK 2-3**

# The Day of the Lord in Hebrew Poetry

## 1 | There are two types of Day of the Lord events in the Old Testament.

- Historical Instance: The rise and fall of “Babylons” to one another that show how human societies sow the seeds of their own destruction, providentially orchestrated by God.
- Future Instance: All of the historical instances point to the one “Day of the Lord.” It is the appointed time when God will eventually orchestrate the downfall of all Babylons and replace them with his kingdom.

## 2 | The heart of Babylon is self-exaltation to divine rule.

Isaiah diagnoses the true problem of Babylon and the human condition as self-exaltation.

The Lord Almighty has a day in store  
for all the proud and lofty...  
The arrogance of man will be brought low  
and human pride humbled;  
the Lord alone will be exalted in that day,  
and the idols will totally disappear.  
People will flee to caves in the rocks  
and to holes in the ground  
from the fearful presence of the Lord  
and the splendor of his majesty,  
when he rises to shake the earth.

ISAIAH 2:12;17-19

Babylon overreached when it came to Jerusalem, so God orchestrated the downfall of Babylon itself.

They come from faraway lands,  
from the ends of the heavens—  
the Lord and the weapons of his wrath—  
to destroy the whole country.  
Wail, for the day of the Lord is near;  
it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

ISAIAH 13:5-6

But why? What has Babylon done?

How you have fallen from heaven,  
morning star\*, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth,  
you who once laid low the nations!  
You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God;  
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,  
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.  
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.”  
But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,  
to the depths of the pit.

**NOTE**  
Morning star:  
star of dawn  
Hebrew: *helel*  
Greek: *heosphoros*  
Latin: *luciferus*

ISAIAH 14:12-15

Isaiah draws upon the ancient mythology of Marduk. Marduk was the son of the chief god, but he elevated himself to the place of the high god, so he was brought down. Isaiah sees dark spiritual powers at work when nations exalt themselves, their interests, and their power as divine. These powers that animate empires and nations will be brought down.

### 3 | The Day of the Lord as a Great War

All of these poetic depictions about the Day of the Lord involve battlefield images of smoke, fire, carnage, and earthquakes that are poetically enhanced.

The stars of heaven and their constellations  
will not show their light.  
The rising sun will be darkened  
and the moon will not give its light.  
I will punish the world for its evil,  
the wicked for their sins.

ISAIAH 13:10-11

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 heavens will tremble.

JOEL 3:15-16

The great day of the Lord is near—  
near and coming quickly.  
The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter;  
the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.  
That day will be a day of wrath—  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of trouble and ruin,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and blackness—  
a day of trumpet and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the corner towers.

ZEPHANIAH 1:14-16

But, like the Exodus story, the prophets know that God will deliver those who cry out to him in humility and repentance. Both Joel and Zephaniah hold out hope for Israel and the nations.

The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance,  
as the Lord has said,  
even among the survivors  
whom the Lord calls.

JOEL 2:31-32

“Therefore wait for me,”  
declares the Lord,  
“for the day I will stand up to testify.  
I have decided to assemble the nations,  
to gather the kingdoms  
and to pour out my wrath on them—  
all my fierce anger.  
The whole world will be consumed  
by the fire of my jealous anger.  
Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,  
that all of them may call on the name of the Lord  
and serve him shoulder to shoulder.  
From beyond the rivers of Cush  
my worshipers, my scattered people,  
will bring me offerings.”

**NOTE**  
The entire chapter  
reads like a new  
version of Exodus 15.

**ZEPHANIAH 3:9-10**

God is depicted as a warrior king who is on a mission to defeat evil among Israel and the nations, to liberate the oppressed and helpless, and to save a people out of this evil age and bring them into a new Jerusalem and a new promised land.

## The Great Day of the Lord Begins with Jesus’ War on Evil.

### 1 | **The Day of the Lord theme is crucial for understanding how Jesus thought of himself and his calling.**

In Jesus’ day, Israel was once more a subjugated people. With the Roman empire ruling over them, people were hoping that the Day of the Lord would come again and defeat Rome. Jesus believed a war was on and that he was a king on the offensive. He believed there were powerful forces of evil at work in the world—spiritual and human—that corrupted people and resulted in violence. Jesus shared Isaiah’s view that dark, spiritual powers were the real enemy.



## 2 | **Jesus battles spiritual evil personally and in the community.**

He confronted a spiritual power of evil in the wilderness that was tempting him to compromise his calling to be the suffering servant and instead embrace the way of independence and military power.

After this victory over evil personally, Jesus launched his kingdom's battle against forces of spiritual evil that were destroying the people of Israel. When confronted about his exorcisms, Jesus told the parables of the warring house and strong man.

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God\* that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house."

LUKE 11:17-22

Note Jesus' confrontation with the demonized man in the graveyard in Mark 5. The demon's name is "Legion," the Roman name for a military unit of a few thousand soldiers. Jesus is claiming here that his kingdom rule is striking at the heart of evil's hold on people. This shows us that Jesus' view of evil is more nuanced. Evil is not to be equated with any single person or people group; rather it's a spiritual and personal reality that has co-opted people individually and corporately.

How will Jesus conquer this form of evil?

## **Jesus' Victory Over Evil: Death and Resurrection**

**The Gospels present Jesus' ultimate confrontation with evil taking place in Jerusalem. He enters the city as a king and calls out the leaders of Israel and Rome as false.**

Pilate summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"... And Jesus said, "My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.

JOHN 18:33,36

Israel's leaders work with Rome to have Jesus killed. The Gospel authors see the forces of spiritual evil behind this.

And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.

LUKE 22:3-4



Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."

LUKE 22:52-53

Jesus allowed himself to undergo the Day of the Lord (the wrath of Rome), so that Israel wouldn't have to. Jesus' crucifixion is the key part of the great Day of the Lord. He conquers evil and death by letting evil conquer him. The judge is judged, and the victim becomes the victor.

## Jesus' Final Battle Against Evil: The Ultimate Day of the Lord

### 1 | Revelation depicts the downfall of Babylon.

In Revelation, the unified kingdoms of the world are called "...the great city, which is spiritually called 'Sodom' and 'Egypt' where even their Lord was crucified." Jerusalem itself has become Sodom-Egypt-Babylon.

REVELATION 11:8

Babylon is portrayed as a dragon and called "Babylon the great." It's depicted as insanely wealthy which should make you think of Solomon's Jerusalem. It is slave-trading and idolatrous.

REVELATION 17-19

### 2 | Jesus shows up for the final battle.

The Day of the Lord in Revelation is described as a final battle involving all nations with swords and blood. But John has intentionally turned all of these symbols inside out in light of the cross.

REVELATION 19-20

- Jesus is announced as a victorious lion, but when John sees Jesus, he's a slaughtered lamb.
- Jesus comes riding on a white horse with a sword, but the sword is "in his mouth."
- He comes with blood on his robe, but the blood is his own.

REVELATION 5:5,6

REVELATION 19:11-21

REVELATION 19:13

These images describe how his victory came not through military means, but through his loving announcement of the kingdom. Jesus' judgment is the peoples' rejection of his self-sacrificial love for them. The final battle ends as God's gloriously renewed creation is ushered in.

### Conclusion:

The history of the term Day of the Lord spans from Genesis to Revelation. It is a phrase used in the Bible to describe how God is at work in history to confront collective human evil, liberate his people from oppression, and assert his rule over all creation.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 | What might the phrase Day of the Lord mean to an average person walking down the street?
- 2 | Discuss the relationship between the Day of the Lord and Babylon as it unfolds from Genesis to Revelation. What strikes you the most?
- 3 | Focus on Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings. What are the key attributes defining Israel's transformation into an "Israel-become-Babylon?"
- 4 | Where might you find these attributes at work in our contemporary world? Furthermore, is an allegiance to Babylon stark or subtle?
- 5 | When the Day was announced by Amos as being directed against Israel, what exactly was being rescued and liberated there?
- 6 | Compare and contrast Jesus' Day of the Lord victory depicted in the Gospels with that of the book of Revelation.
- 7 | Does reading scripture about the future Day of the Lord force one to make choices between Jesus' upside-down kingdom and Babylon? If so, how?
- 8 | What does your own participation in Jesus' new creation/new Jerusalem/reigning kingdom look like in terms of your present identity and your belief about the future?

