

THE BIBLE'S WATCHWORD: DAY OF THE LORD

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The biblical phrase “Day of the Lord” (DOL) stands as a key term in understanding God’s revelation about the future.¹ The NT writers’ use of DOL rested upon their understanding of the OT prophets. A survey of the OT indicates that it was used by the prophets when speaking of both near historical and future eschatological events involving God’s wrath. The NT writers picked up on the eschatological use and applied DOL both to the judgment which will climax the Tribulation period and the judgment which will usher in the new earth. This view is not only compatible with but also strengthens the case for Futuristic Premillennialism and a Pretribulational Rapture.

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Because “day of the Lord” appears so frequently in Scripture, it is incumbent upon the Bible interpreter/expositor to get it right. The implications are not minor. Yet, it is one of the most hotly contested elements in the field of eschatology.

This writer’s approach has been to follow a basic protocol:

1. Determine what DOL meant to OT authors.
2. Assume that with nineteen appearances of DOL in the OT, then this meaning was carried forward to the four NT occurrences.
3. Test this thesis to see how it relates to a dispensational/futuristic eschatology.

DOL appears in four uncontested NT passages (Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; and 2 Pet 3:10). However, OT prophets actually wrote more about DOL. The OT provided the basis for whatever Peter and Paul understood about DOL. Beecher argued that

¹ The original work on this theme first appeared in Richard Lee Mayhue, “The Prophets’ Watchword: DAY OF THE LORD.” (doctoral diss: Grace Theological Seminary, 1981). The author has updated his research and refined his thinking to 2011.

All doctrines in regard to the millennium, the second coming of Christ, and the final judgment depend greatly on the passages in the New Testament that use the formulas, “the day of the Lord,” “the day of our Lord,” “that day,” and the like; such passages, for example, as 2 Pet. iii:10, 1 Thess. v:2, 1 Cor. i:8, v:5, 2 Cor. i:14, 2 Thess. i:10, 2 Tim. i:12, Matt. xxv:13, etc. The meaning of these passages is, in turn, greatly dependent on the relations that exist, both in ideas and in phraseology, between them and the texts in the Old Testament that speak of “the day of the Lord,” that is, “the day of Jehovah.” Necessarily, the study of these places in the Old Testament will be profitable, both in itself and for the light it throws on New Testament eschatology.²

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND³

God’s servants, the prophets, spoke of DOL as both near historical and far eschatological events. In many passages DOL moves from the near to the far. This relationship between near and far can be seen in Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, and Zephaniah.

NEAR	FAR
Obadiah 1–14	15–21
Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11	2:31; 3:14
Isaiah 13:6	13:9
Zephaniah 1:7	1:14

Beecher commented, “The prophets thought of the day of Yahweh as generic, not occasions which would occur once for all, but one which might be repeated as circumstances called for it.”⁴ Kaiser, who has been influenced by Beecher, similarly explains, “That final time would be climactic and the sum of all the rest. Though the events of their own times fitted the pattern of God’s future judgment, that final day was nevertheless immeasurably larger and more permanent in its salvific and judgmental effects.”⁵

DOL prophecies found fulfillment in various ways. These included (1) the Assyrian deportation of Israel ca. 722 BC (Amos 5:18, 20), (2) the Assyrian invasion of Judah ca. 701 BC (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11), (3) the Babylonian exile of Judah ca. 605–586 BC (Isa 13:6; Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Zeph 1:7), (4)

² W.J. Beecher, “The Day of Jehovah in Joel,” *The Homiletic Review* 18 (1889): 355.

³ The following OT summary has been abstracted from Richard Mayhue, “The Prophets’ Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (Fall 1985):23–46.

⁴ W.J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905), 311.

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 191.

the Babylonian defeat of Egypt ca. 568 BC (Ezek 30:3), (5) the demise of Edom ca. 845 BC (Obad 1–14), and (6) the eschatological judgments of the Tribulation period (Isa 2:12; 13:9; Joel 2:31; 3:14; Obad 15; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5).

Specific fulfillments of DOL prophecies are detailed in Scripture. But the question arises whether there are DOL events which are not specifically named as such in Scripture. This is a difficult question because God has certainly intervened in human affairs on more occasions than the prophets specifically outlined. The Genesis flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would seem to be cases in point. On the other hand, some seem to view every disaster in history as a DOL event. The solution to the question is to understand that the prophets were calling for present repentance in light of both a near historical judgment and an ultimate eschatological judgment. Charles Feinberg provides a biblically balanced approach to this problem: “Some have interpreted the significant phrase (DOL) to mean any time in which God’s judgments are experienced on earth. Although such an interpretation will allow for all the references to be included under it, nevertheless it empties the words of their well-known eschatological force.”⁶

The prominent theme of every DOL prophecy is God’s judgment of sin.⁷ God’s blessings are anticipatory and attendant to the DOL but do not assume their intended expression until the DOL concludes; thus the full experience of God’s blessing follows, rather than encompasses, DOL.

Imminency often characterizes DOL. In Joel 1:15; 2:1; Isaiah 13:6; Zephaniah 1:7; and Ezekiel 30:3, near historical fulfillments are prominent. The far event is described as “near” in Obadiah 15; Joel 3:14; and Zephaniah 1:14. In the prophets’ minds, the event was certainly coming and would one day occur in the indeterminate future. DOL judgments are poured out on individual nations, such as Edom, Egypt and its allies, and Israel. Yet such judgments will one day be inflicted upon all of the nations according to Obadiah 15 and Zechariah 14:1. Tasker has written this lucid summary:

The expression “the day of the Lord” at the time of the rise of the great prophets of Israel denoted an event to which the Israelites were looking forward as the day of Jehovah’s final vindication of *the righteousness of His people* against their enemies. One of the tasks of the prophets was to insist that in fact “the day of the Lord” would be a day on which God would vindicate “His own righteousness” not only against the enemies of Israel, but also against Israel itself. This “day of the Lord” throughout Old Testament prophecy remains a future reality, though there were events within the history covered by the Old Testament

⁶ Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 172.

⁷ L. Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: Nakladem Filosofiche Fakulty University Karlong, 1948). Appendix A documents over twenty-five OT words/phrases involving God’s wrath/judgment associated with and describing DOL in the OT.

story which were indeed days of judgment both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her.⁸

Ladd has succinctly stated the historical-eschatological tension which pressed and pulled at the prophet. His comments are worth noting:

In all of these prophecies, history, and eschatology are so blended together as to be practically indistinguishable. Sometimes, however, the eschatological Day stands in the background on the distant horizon.⁹

The prophets viewed the immediate historical future against the background of the final eschatological consummation, for the same God who was acting in history would finally establish his Kingdom. Therefore, the Day of the Lord was near because God was about to act; and the historical event was in a real sense an anticipation of the final eschatological deed, for it was the working of the same God for the same redemptive purpose. This historical imminence of the Day of the Lord did not include all that the Day of the Lord meant; history and eschatology were held in a dynamic tension, for both were the Day of the Lord. This bond was broken in the apocalypses. Eschatology stood in the future, unrelated to present historical events. The God of eschatology was no longer the God of history.¹⁰

The DOL is a generic biblical phrase used by God's prophets to describe either the immediate future or the ultimate eschatological consummation.¹¹ It is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers only to one event in God's plan.

It may designate a divinely-sent locust plague (Joel 1:15) or the providential fall of Babylon (Isa 13:6) or of Jerusalem (Zeph 1:14–15, 18; 2:1) and in one given context it may describe first a judgment and then a corresponding deliverance (compare with the above prophecies

⁸ R.V.G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 45.

⁹ George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 68.

¹⁰ Ibid., 320.

¹¹ Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*, 130, defines a generic prophecy as one which "regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter part, or to the whole—in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of its parts."

Joel 3:14, 18 and Zeph 3:8, 11, 16; cf. also Obad 15, 17; Zech 14:1, 9–11).¹²

DOL is used to describe several events and is limited only by its mention in biblical revelation. Each appearance of DOL must be interpreted in its context to determine whether the prophet expected the immediate historical act of God or Yahweh's ultimate eschatological visitation.¹³ DOL is not bound to a definite time duration. It could last for only hours or it could continue for days. Context alone can determine DOL longevity, and even then only general approximation can be made. This is how DOL appears in the OT.

NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The revelation of God through eight Old Testament prophets provided New Testament writers with a comprehensive description of the DOL concept. Peter and Paul, the only authors to use the phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου (*hēméra kuriou*), apply and expand this central OT prophetic concept in the NT.¹⁴

Acts 2:20

There have been four major interpretations:

1. Fulfillment at Pentecost—The prophecy of Joel was fulfilled fully and finally on the day of Pentecost. The fulfillment of this prophecy of grace occurred when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:17).¹⁵
2. Completed at Pentecost—The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy partially occurred in Joel's day and was finalized at Pentecost.¹⁶

¹² J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 60.

¹³ Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 74.

¹⁴ The following NT summary has been abstracted from Richard L. Mayhue, “The Apostles’ Watchword: Day of the Lord,” in *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent, Jr.*, ed. Gary T. Meaders (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1991), 239–63. See F.F. Bruce, “Eschatology in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *The Heritage of the Early Church*, eds. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 77–89 who establishes that very little was written about DOL at this time immediately following the close of the NT Canon.

¹⁵ E.J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 155. Also E. Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1845), 115; R.B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1904), 27.

¹⁶ C.F. Keil, *Minor Prophets. Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. X., trans. James Martin (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 216, acknowledges this position, but does not affirm it as correct.

3. The “Partial” or “Earnest” Fulfillment—The Pentecost experience was in part a fulfillment of Joel’s words. Some add the idea that the outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost was a guarantee that it would happen in full later.¹⁷
4. The Eschatological Only Fulfillment—Joel’s prophecy by strict interpretation deals only with DOL, which occurs at the Tribulation period conclusion.¹⁸

This writer champions the latter interpretation and offers these reasons for support:

1. The phrase that Peter uses to introduce the quote from Joel, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel,” is not the typical phrase used by New Testament writers. The phrase “In order that it might be fulfilled” is usual fare. Even then, this explicit phrase can be used to introduce an analogous relationship (Jer 31:5; Matt 2:18) or a preview/partial fulfillment (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17). While this point alone does not secure a favorable verdict, it certainly allows for it.
2. The verb *εἰμί* (*eimi*) is often used, not only in the sense of equation, but also metaphor. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7) or “This is my body” (Matt 26:26). It is reasonable to assume that it could be used that way here.¹⁹
3. Peter is here most likely saying, “this is the sort of thing.” He is arguing from analogy or illustration and applying it representatively to his current experience.
4. The exclusive theme of DOL is judgment for sin. Because Pentecost was a day of blessing, Peter could not be saying that it fulfilled Joel’s prophecy.

¹⁷ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1962), 383; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Promise of God and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:16–21,” in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, eds. Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 109–22. George Eldon Ladd, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, eds. C.F. Pfeiffer and E.F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 1127; Gotthard V. Lechler, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. J.P. Lange, trans. C.F. Shaeffer (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9:41; Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago Moody, 1968), 155; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 212; Walter K. Price, *The Prophet Joel and the Day of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 66.

¹⁸ Roy E. Beacham, “Joel, Eschatology of” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, gen. ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 213–19; Timothy L. Decker, “A Fresh Look at Darrell Bock’s Interpretation Concerning Peter’s Use of Joel 2 in Acts 2 with Regard to Enactment of the New Covenant,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology*, 14(August 2010): 63–79; Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 82; cf. Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 100.

¹⁹ *BAGD*, 2nd ed., s.v. “*εἰμι*.”

5. Note carefully that Peter begins with the outpouring of God's Spirit (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 2:28) and concludes with the offer of salvation (Acts 2:21; cf. Joel 2:32). These are the only two points that Peter finds parallel to Joel in his present circumstance.
6. The very content of Joel's prophecy argues against its fulfillment at Pentecost. The Spirit was not poured out upon all mankind (Joel 2:28) but rather upon the disciples. Secondly, the cosmic signs were in no way present (Joel 2:30–31). I would agree on this point with Kaiser who calls this Acts 2 experience "a preliminary fulfillment," "mere harbingers," or "samples" of the final Holy Spirit downpour.²⁰
7. It has been argued that "the last days" began with the church at Pentecost and encompasses time to the end. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX can be translated "afterward" or "after these things," noting general chronology between burden and blessing. It seems a strange methodology then to use Peter's phrase "in the last days" and make it a technical term referring to the church age. Rather, it seems best to take it at face value, meaning "the last days of the period that Joel mentions," i.e., the end of the Tribulation period and the inception of the Millennium. In its most general sense, it means "days that are subsequent to the days now under consideration without regard for intervening time or event." Only context can help determine the time.²¹

This writer suggests that Peter's mention of DOL within his quote of Joel 2:28–32 was probably incidental to his purpose. It adds no interpretive value to our understanding of DOL that had not already been obtained from a study of Joel's prophecy.

1 Thessalonians 5:2

They were reminded that the well-known and frequently-taught DOL concept in the Old Testament would come unannounced and thus unexpectedly, just like a thief comes unexpectedly, without prior warning.²² DOL here is to be understood as DOL was in the Old Testament—a time of judgment upon the unbelieving world. Paul's following discussion about night and darkness demands this.

²⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 99.

²¹ See Hans Kosmala, "At the End of the Days," *Swedish Theological Annual* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 2:27–31, for an excellent discussion of these terms.

²² See Joel 2:9; Matt 24:42–44; Luke 12:35–40; 1 Thess 5:4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3 and 16:15 for κλέπτη (kleptēs) used in a prophetic motif. Note also Luke 21:34 where the illustration of a trap παγί (pagis) is used. Cf. Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1999), 125–36.

There is a major grammatical indicator in 5:3. Paul switches from the second person plural pronoun referring to the Thessalonians to the third person plural pronoun referring to those who are unsaved. This indicates that the Thessalonians will not be present. Paul gives further explanation in 5:4ff.

Those who do inhabit the earth at that time will expect a time of peace and safety when in fact destruction is inevitable and inescapable. It shall come suddenly and irreversibly (like the birth pangs of a mother-to-be) upon them (5:3; cf. Isa 66:7–8; Mic 4:9; Matt 24:8).

This was not a new phenomenon in the annals of history. Jeremiah cried out to God that false prophets had led the people astray by promises of lasting peace without war or famine (Jer 14:13; see also 6:14; 8:11). This was during a time which preceded the DOL manifestation in the Babylonian captivity and is analogous to the time preceding the eschatological DOL.

Ezekiel indicted the pseudo-prophets for misleading God's people when there was no peace. Significant here is that it appears in the immediate context of a primary DOL text (Ezek 13:5). The people in Amos' day also foolishly but sincerely expected blessing rather than judgment (5:18).

Paul is saying that the basic circumstances which existed and provoked the historical DOL will also bring about the eschatological DOL. It will be through the deception of Satan (Rev 12:9; 13:11–14) and the permitted delusion by God (2 Thess 2:11) that they will, like those of old, believe what is false in spite of evidence around them to the contrary.

This writer believes that 1 Thessalonians 5:4 holds the real key to understanding the import of this to the Thessalonian church. Paul asserts that these precious believers were not in darkness. He is referring to their spiritual state. Thus, it is implied here, as well as stated explicitly (5:5), that they are sons of light and day.²³

Because of their right spiritual relationship with God, Paul concludes that "the day," referring to DOL in 5:2, would not overtake them. That is to say, they will not be involved in the DOL.

1 Thessalonians 5 teaches several significant qualities about the eschatological DOL.

1. The Thessalonians knew all that they needed to know about the time of DOL (5:1).
2. The day like a thief will come uninvited, unannounced, and unexpected (5:2).
3. The day will come as a complete shock to those expecting peace and safety (5:3)
4. The day is inevitable and irreversible (5:3), like the birth pangs of a woman entering labor.

²³ See John 1:4, 5, 7–9; 3:19–20; 8:12; Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 Pet 2:9; and 1 John 1:5–7 where the idea of light is used in the sense of spiritual purity.

5. The day will not come upon those of light (5:4), like the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 2:2²⁴

The Thessalonians had been shaken from their composure and alarmed by the erroneous report or teaching that they were in the midst of the DOL (2:2). The source of error was a false teacher ($\pi\nu\epsilon\psi\mu\alpha$; *pneuma*, cf. 1 John 4:1–3), or a messenger from someone with a false message ($\lambda\circ\gamma\circi$; *logos*), or the carrier of a letter allegedly written by the apostle. It is most likely that their theology was supported by and defended with the trials and tribulations that presently attended the Thessalonians' life circumstances.

Paul answers the Thessalonians' question and addresses the eschatological error by arguing that the present circumstances could in no way be the DOL. But, what did the errorists say?

First, it is possible that the errorists taught that the Thessalonians were in the DOL knowing that Paul had taught Posttribulationism. But one would expect the Thessalonians to rejoice because the Rapture would be imminent. In fact, the Thessalonians panicked and thus it is concluded that this is not the correct reconstruction.

Second, it is possible that the errorists taught that the Thessalonians were in the DOL knowing that Paul had taught Pretribulationism. The conclusion would be that the Thessalonians had missed the Rapture. But this seems unlikely because the Thessalonians would know that the errorists themselves and certainly many others, including Paul, had missed the Rapture.

A third possibility does exist. The false teachers taught the Thessalonians that they were in the DOL and additionally that Paul was wrong altogether in that there would be no rapture. Regardless of what Paul taught about the time of the Rapture, they insisted that Paul was wrong about the fact of the Rapture, i.e., there would be none. The following reasons make this possibility the most compelling.

1. This third possibility explains why Paul does not appeal directly to the Rapture.²⁵ To do so would have opened Paul to the charge of circular reasoning, and there were no Old Testament passages to which he could point. Therefore, he possibly appealed to Daniel to

²⁴ The TR reads $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\circ\upsilon$ (*Christou*) along with D³ and K. $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\circ\upsilon$ (*kuriou*) is overwhelmingly supported by the uncial evidence, the early versions, and both Greek and Latin fathers. Cf. Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 168–84.

²⁵ Some have labored tortuously to see rapture in $\acute{\alpha}\pi\circ\sigma\tau\alpha\circ\iota\alpha$ (*apostasia*) like H. Wayne House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 261–96. Cf. Paul D. Feinberg, "2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 309–11 who decisively demonstrates why $\acute{\alpha}\pi\circ\sigma\tau\alpha\circ\iota\alpha$ must refer to "apostasy" and not "rapture."

show that the Thessalonians could not be in the DOL. Paul's strategy was to show that the errorists were wrong on one major point and therefore were unreliable in other major areas such as the fact of the Rapture.

2. It explains why he showed them that they were not in the Great Tribulation of the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. He wanted to teach them how misleading it was to develop or interpret their theology based on current events.
3. It explains why the Thessalonians were shaken. They tested the errorists' theology against the times in which they lived and concluded that they were right and the apostle was wrong. If Paul was wrong on this point, he could have been wrong anywhere.
4. It explains why Paul appealed to his previous messages. His theology had not changed and it was in perfect harmony with Daniel. Paul supported revelatory authentication of theology and discredited experiential verification.
5. It explains why Paul did not assertively appeal to his apostolic authority. The Thessalonians were already under intense pressure from unbelievers in the community and from the disappointment that Paul might be wrong. Paul apparently turns them to the Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:10

This former Galilean fisherman makes a unique contribution to the study of DOL. He applies the term of judgment to God's terminal wrath poured out on the earth. No other OT or NT DOL passage uses the term in a detailed reference to the event that immediately precedes eternity future.

The figure of a thief is used, as it was at 1 Thessalonians 5:2, to describe the uninvited, unannounced, and unexpected invasion of God into the affairs of this world. This time the results are devastating. The heavens, the elements, the earth and its works are purged by fire. Parallel passages include Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1. Few would dispute placing this occurrence of DOL at the millennium's end as preparatory to eternity future.²⁶

But an important question is raised. Is the DOL a lengthy period that includes the entire millennial period? Most dispensationalists insist that the extended period concept is right. John Walvoord is used here merely to illustrate the point.

²⁶ See R. Larry Overstreet, "A Study of 2 Peter 3:10–13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (Oct–Dec, 1980): 354–71; George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 2:504–9 and Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Chicago: Moody, 1954), 179–83, argue unconvincingly that Peter refers to the time immediately preceding the Millennium.

“...the day of the Lord” is an extensive time period which includes not only the tribulation and the judgments taking place at the second advent, but which includes also the entire millennial reign of Christ as a time period in which the Lord deals directly with human sin.²⁷

Other than the fact that DOL is used to describe a judgment which precedes the Millennium and is used to describe the postmillennial, pre-eternity judgment (Rev 20:7–10), there is minimal biblical evidence to warrant extending DOL into the Millennium. Because DOL is chiefly a time of judgment, the Millennium is *not* a part of DOL. In the New Testament, like the Old, DOL is a multiple fulfillment concept which moves toward the final and complete judgment revealed in 2 Peter 3:10.

R.H. Charles said it best:

...the Day of Yahweh does not in itself constitute the blessed future, but only the decisive act of judgment which inaugurates it.²⁸

In summary, Peter is dependent upon Joel 2:28–32 which he quotes in his powerful proclamation on Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). Paul mentions DOL twice in his Thessalonian correspondence. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, he evidences dependence on Joel 2:9 for the terminology “like a thief.” Joel pictures soldiers coming on DOL and entering through windows like thieves. He also associates DOL as coming upon those who cry when disaster is imminent (5:3). This was Ezekiel’s indictment of false prophets in the DOL context of Ezekiel 13. Second Thessalonians 2:2 makes a unique contribution to the study of DOL. Paul writes facts about the precursors to DOL that had not yet appeared anywhere else.

Second Peter 3:10 adds the most unique feature of all the DOL passages. Peter discloses that the DOL concept has an ultimate expression which even the Old Testament prophets did not envision or did not separate from that which they viewed as final. The termination of earth’s history is marked by God’s final judgment and cleansing of His creation. It is possible that Peter used the terminology of Zephaniah 1:14. However, he definitely transferred it to the end of time in preparation for the entrance of eternity future.

PRECURSORS TO THE DAY OF THE LORD

As discussed above, two DOL events yet remain in God’s revealed prophetic plans. The first will occur during Daniel’s 70th week; the other

²⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 273.

²⁸ R.H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), 83.

happens at the end of Christ's millennial reign. For the latter, the only precursors will be the approach of the 1000th year of Christ's kingdom and the Satan-led rebellion against Christ's kingship (Rev 20:7–10). However, for the former, Scripture provides five precursors to establish the *terminus a quo* during the seven-year interim between the Rapture and Christ's arrival to rule. There are also strong indications of the *terminus ad quem*.

Malachi 4:5

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

The best way to understand Malachi is to see that John was a type of Elijah, but he did not completely fulfill Malachi's prophecy. Another, as a type of Elijah, will precede Christ at His posttribulational coming as the *first* precursor. This view seems most reasonable in that,

1. It allows for a future type fulfillment in the same fashion that John was a type fulfillment at Christ's first advent (Matt 11:14).
2. It accounts for Christ referring to both the past coming (John) and the future coming as Elijah's coming. What is true in Matthew 17:12 will be also true in 17:11.
3. There is prophetic precedent for referring to Christ's future forerunner as Elijah in Ezekiel's reference to Christ as David (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5).

Therefore, if we concluded that:

1. John the Baptist was Elijah in type only (Matt 17:12–13; Luke 1:17; John 1:21).
2. John partially fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:5–6 as Christ's forerunner at the first advent (Luke 1:17).
3. Malachi 4:5–6 will be finally fulfilled before the second advent by a type of Elijah (Matt 17:12–13) in much the same manner as John was one in "spirit and power" of Elijah at Christ's first coming.

The question remains, Where in Scripture does he come? The answer is that the Bible does not say conclusively. The only clue is to assume that what was generally true of John will be generally true about his future replacement. The only prophetic mention of a prophet who (1) comes to herald the King before the King is crowned and (2) is martyred for that cause is in Revelation 11:1–13.

It is very possible that one of these two prophets will be an Elijah-like person who will have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain might not

fall during the days of his prophesying (Jas 5:17). This would easily fulfill Malachi's prophecy.²⁹

If the second is a Moses-like person who will have the power to turn water to blood (Ex 7:17) and plague the earth, then the Transfiguration experience (Matt 17:1–8) was a preview of this prophecy in Revelation 11 which was partially revealed in Malachi 4:5–6.

On the other hand, if this hypothesis is wrong, then the Scripture makes no further mention of Christ's forerunner at the second advent. Either way is possible. Neither one disrupts the basic thesis that Malachi 4:5 will be fulfilled by an Elijah-like person who will come in the 'spirit and power' of John the Baptist.

This precursor to DOL has been dealt with first not because of its chronological certainty but because of its uncertainty. If the relationship of John's death to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is paralleled, then the martyrdom of the two witnesses would occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation period or shortly thereafter. This does not mean that DOL begins at the midpoint, but only that the midpoint occurs before DOL.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed wither by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Paul is writing to convince the Thessalonians that they were not in the midst (ἐνέστηκεν; *enestēkev*) of DOL.³⁰ His first apologetic centers on the fact that certain future events precede the DOL (2:3–4). The obvious conclusion to be reached is that if events not future precede DOL then DOL is even further in the future and therefore the Thessalonians could not be in the DOL. He provides precursors two and three.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of the interpretive history surrounding Revelation 11:3 and the identity of the two witnesses, see John P. Lange, "Revelation," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 12:227–33.

³⁰ This perfect tense of ἐνέστηκεν (*enestēken*) is used to denote present time at Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; Hebrews 9:9. It commonly is used in the papyri to denote the *current* month and year. See James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (1930; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 215 for examples.

The *second* precursor is the apostasy (ή ἀποστασία; *ē apostasia*). The word primarily means a deliberate abandonment of a formerly professed position or view and is limited in the LXX, papyri, and New Testament to political or religious rebellion.³¹

What apostasy, which Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians (2:5), could he refer to here? It is proposed that it is the most daring attempt by Satan, through the Antichrist, to draw to himself the glory, honor, and worship that are rightfully God's. Paul taught this to the Thessalonians from the prophet Daniel.

The Tribulation period, which consists of one week of years, is the subject at Daniel 9:27.³² For the first half of the week or 3 ½ years (1260 days), the Antichrist abides by the seven year covenant. During this time, temple worship and sacrifice flourish. But at the mid-point (Rev 13:5), the Antichrist stops the sacrifices (9:22), involves himself in the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15) and takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God (2 Thess 2:4; Rev 13:6, 8, 12, 15).

Because this epitome of blasphemy does not occur until the mid-point of the Tribulation period, DOL could in no way occur before. Like precursor one (Mal 4:5), this only establishes the earliest time that DOL could begin, but it does not demand that it commence at this point.

The *third* precursor involves the man of sin following after the apostasy which came first (*πρῶτον*; *prōton*). He is described by four terms:

1. the man of lawlessness who is characterized by sin (Dan 7:25; 8:25);
2. the son of perdition who is characterized by ultimate loss of well being (Dan 8:25; 9:27; John 17:12);
3. the opposing one who challenges God (Dan 7:25; 11:36);
4. the exalting one who places himself temporarily in the place of God (Dan 11:36).

This one will be the leader and personification of the apostasy, which will have its day from the abomination of desolation until Armageddon. Whoever he is, Paul expected his audience to understand in light of the DOL topic and what Paul had previously taught from the Old Testament.

³¹ Read the discussions of Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 114–18 and George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 98. Key uses of the term include Acts 21:21 and Joshua 22:22. It is appropriate that ἀποστασία was used of Antiochus Epiphanes against Israel in 1 Maccabees 2:15. He is the historical prefiguration of Antichrist as portrayed by Daniel.

³² See Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940) for an excellent treatise on this subject.

A careful study of Daniel 7–11, Matthew 24, and Revelation 13 confirms that this one is the second person of the Satanic trinity (Rev 16:13) known biblically as Anti-Christ or the beast (Rev 13:1–8). It is this final and most blatant attempt by Satan and his diabolical partners to displace the triune God as ruler of the kingdom that will cause Christ to come as conqueror and execute DOL and inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

Until the beast has been given his forty-two months (Rev 13:5), DOL cannot arrive.

Joel 3:14

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

The *fourth* precursor comes when Joel 3 pictures a time when God will restore Judah (3:2; cf. Ezek 37) and judge the nations (3:12–17). It will be a time of God's wrath poured out upon the world's population (3:13; cf. Rev. 14:14–20).

Other prophets also spoke of this event. For instance Ezekiel 38:17–23; 39:1–8; Zechariah 12:3, 6, 8–9; 14:2–3; Revelation 16:12–16.

The war encompasses all of Palestine. The focal point seems to be Jerusalem. The carnage will be throughout the land (Rev 14:7–20). As in the days of King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:15), the battle was not the Jews' but God's. God would prevail (20:22–23) and Jerusalem would rejoice (20:26–30). Joel pictures the armies gathered and poised for war *before* DOL. These events are the climactic experiences of the Tribulation period prior to the DOL.

This study of events which are explicitly said in Scripture to precede DOL have led from the mid-point of the Tribulation period to the conclusion of Daniel's 70th week.

Joel 2:31

These harbingers of the Lord's soon intervention were included in the near eschatological fulfillment of DOL (Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10). They will also be prominent immediately prior to the premillennial DOL as the *fifth* precursor.

The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood...

Joel 2:31

The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.

Joel 3:15

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light.

Isaiah 13:10

But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Matthew 24:29

But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT.

Mark 13:24

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves.

Luke 21:25

And I looked when he broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth make of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

Revelation 6:12

And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

Revelation 8:12

The clearest text from which to see the order of events in the final days of this unprecedented period is the Olivet Discourse. Jesus is describing the events of the Tribulation period (Matt 24:15ff.).

In Matthew 24:29, Jesus said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." He is referring to the time which began at the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15), i.e. the middle of the 70th week and continued to the time of signs from heaven.

The stellar signals follow the tribulation of those days (Matt 24:29). Here our Lord is referring to Joel 2:31. These cosmic wonders come at the very end of the Tribulation period as noted in the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet. Joel wrote that these indications are "before" the DOL. Thus the Tribulation period has come to its grand finale and the prophets still claim DOL has not quite yet arrived.

Jesus then says in Matthew 24:30 that after all of this:

1. the sign of the Son of Man will appear;
2. they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.

This is the premillennial DOL when the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 16:16) visibly appears to pour out the wrath of God (Rev 6:17; 11:18; 14:19; 16:19; 19:15) upon the diabolically rebellious world population. Revelation 19:19–21 describes with brevity the righteous DOL judgment of God.

Summary

God has not left the student of Scriptures without sufficient evidence to locate the premillennial DOL in relationship to the Tribulation period. Precursors or events antecedent to the DOL are described in Malachi 4:5, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, Joel 3:14, and Joel 2:31 (Matt 24:29; Acts 2:20). These preceding indicators cannot begin until the middle of the seven-year Tribulation period.

1. An Elijah-like forerunner will precede Christ at the DOL as John the Baptist came before the first advent (Mal 4:5).
2. The great rebellion of the earth's inhabitants against God (2 Thess 2:3) comes before DOL.
3. The revelation of the lawless one at the abomination of desolation (2 Thess 2:3–4) will precede DOL.
4. The nations will be assembled in the valley of decision as DOL draws near (Joel 3:14).
5. Unmistakable signs in the sun, moon, and stars herald the nearness of DOL (Joel 2:31; cf. Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12–13).

Joel 2:31 with Matthew 24:29–30 indicates that the premillennial DOL actually begins with the appearance of Jesus Christ to judge the world. The duration of this short period is not revealed and therefore any attempt to quantify it would be mere speculation and without spiritual profit.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Through the years some questions/objections have been raised regarding this writer's view of DOL. For the most part, these inquiries have revolved around the idea that this DOL view undermines the dispensational position of “Futuristic Premillennialism” and a “Pretribulation Rapture.”

As the answers will indicate, there has never been a one-size-fits-all approach to DOL among dispensationalists. Yet, with a very few exceptions, they all have remained, “Premill/Pretrib.” There are differing thoughts on the nature of DOL, the *terminus a quo*, the *terminus ad quem*, the frequency, and the duration. Yet, the same basic eschatology remains.

How do you explain these many variations regarding DOL without undermining a uniform futurist eschatology?

It would appear that the many variations result not from an inductive study of DOL, first in the OT and second in the NT. Rather, it seems to come about in a sincere, but misguided attempt, to defend Dispensational

Premillennialism even if less than skillful exegesis might have been involved. The purpose of this article has been to go where Scripture leads as the first priority. In this case, the writer's view is that the positions of "Futuristic Premillennialism" and "Pretribulational Rapture" are strengthened, not weakened by the proposed view of DOL.

Since DOL (end of Daniel's 70th week) and DOL (conclusion of the Millennium) are bookends to the Millennium in your view, is not the Millennium a continuous part of DOL?

Unquestionably, the Millennium is a time of blessing and the time before and after are times of judgment. However, there is no explicit basis in either the OT or NT to include blessing as a part of DOL. Blessing comes sometimes as a result of DOL but is never included in the DOL. "While it is true that 'in that day' includes both a time of judgment (tribulation) and a time of blessing (millennium), the same is not true of the 'Day of the Lord,' which in every context is always judgment and is never found in a millennial context."³³

Does not the phrase "that day" in Zechariah 14:1 prove that DOL is a time of both judgment and blessing?

It is taught by some that DOL is a time of both judgment and blessing. The "that day" phrase in Zechariah becomes their court of appeal. The phrase appears seven times in Zechariah 14. Verses 4, 6, 13, and 21 describe God's judgment while verses 8, 9, 20 really do not describe the DOL blessings but rather events subsequent to DOL. Joel 2:18–30 and 3:18–21 also talk of restoration blessing, which is a prominent promise of God to Israel throughout the prophets. But again it is insisted that blessing is subsequent to, not the reason for DOL. Blessing can be (but not always) the end, but DOL judgment is the means.

Consider these observations.

1. Every Old Testament DOL passage speaks in the context of sinfulness and God's chastisement in judgment.
2. The fulfillment of DOL in the near eschatological sense never involved blessing.
3. Not all of the passages that deal with DOL in the far eschatological realm even mention blessing (cf. Isa 2:12, Isa 13:9, Zeph 1:14).
4. DOL is always described as a day of God's anger and wrath, never a day of God's blessing.

As "day" is employed in Genesis 1–2 in two different senses, so it can be with "that day." Day is used in Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, etc. in a narrow sense to speak of a twenty-four-hour day. But in Genesis 2:4, it speaks in a broad sense of the entire creation period consisting of six days. So it is in Joel 3:14 (the

³³ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Is There a Pre-wrath Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 390.

narrow sense of DOL) and Joel 3:18 (the broader sense of a longer time frame beyond DOL which includes resultant blessing). The same would be true of Zech 14:1 where 14:8, 9, 20–21 speak to a time of blessing beyond DOL.

DOL is the time when God intervenes as the righteous judge to impose and execute His divinely decreed punishment. Only after the primary eschatological DOL which climaxes the Tribulation, and after the judgments are fulfilled, will God reign on earth with millennial blessing.

Are not supposed precursors to DOL actually events within DOL?

Malachi 4:5 writes that an Elijah-like person will arrive on the scene “before” the coming of DOL. Joel 3:12–14 reports that DOL is “near” when the armies are gathered in the valley of decision. Matthew 24:27–30 expects there to be unequaled stellar activity “immediately” before the coming of Christ and DOL. The language seems unmistakable. Each of these three activities precede or, put another way, are precursors to DOL.

While some may want to take issue with 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, it seems clear that Paul’s immediate point is that they could not be in the DOL as falsely taught because two events that have not yet occurred precede DOL – (1) the great apostasy and (2) the appearing of the man of lawlessness, i.e., Antichrist.

For those who want to start DOL with the Pretribulational Rapture or the Posttribulational Rapture this presents a major problem. One cannot have imminency in regard to the Rapture, if there are precursors. However, if DOL occurs after the Pretribulational Rapture, then Scripture has spoken and there is no problem.

Isn’t DOL starting with the Rapture an essential part of dispensational eschatology?

The short answer is “No!” Never has been; never will be. There is no necessary connection between a Pretribulational Rapture and the *terminus a quo* of DOL. For instance, the original *Scofield Reference Bible* began DOL at the end of Daniel’s 70th week³⁴ while the *New Scofield Reference Bible* pointed to the Rapture just before this seven-year period.³⁵ Yet both teach a Pretribulational Rapture.

There is a range of dispensational opinions on when DOL begins.

1. With the Rapture³⁶
2. Soon after the Rapture³⁷

³⁴ C.I. Scofield, ed. *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1349, n.1.

³⁵ C.I. Scofield and E. Schuyler English, gen. eds. *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1372, n.5.

³⁶ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), 264; D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 211.

3. Midpoint of Daniel's 70th week³⁸
4. End of Daniel's 70th week³⁹

Doesn't your view of DOL support a Posttribulation view of the Rapture?

Not at all. There are a variety of views on the nature of DOL, all of which also hold to a Pretribulational Rapture. There is no necessary connection between the time of the Rapture and the nature of DOL. Just because some dispensationalists⁴⁰ and non-dispensationalists⁴¹ hold to a Posttribulation Rapture, does not make it necessary to the time of the Rapture.

For instance, some see DOL as a time of judgment and blessing which starts with judgment (Daniel's 70th week), continues with blessing (the millennium) and concludes with judgment (Rev 20:7–10).⁴² While others see DOL as a time of judgment only. Views on the duration of judgment vary.

1. Entire week⁴³
2. Last half of week⁴⁴
3. End of week⁴⁵

There is a fourth view, a conflated view. This position, which tries to take advantage of both the “wrath only” and “wrath/blessing” views, proposes

³⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, in *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 230–31; Robert Saucy, “The Eschatology of the Bible,” in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:107; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 110.

³⁸ Paul Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid, or Post-Tribulational?*, ed., Richard R. Reiter, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 61.

³⁹ Louis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:398.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 10.

⁴¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1135.

⁴² John F. Walvoord, “The Day of the Lord,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 4:2 (Fall 2000):14.

⁴³ Fruchtenbaum, *Trumpet Sound*, 390; “Day of the Lord,” *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, Mal Couch, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 37.

⁴⁴ P. Feinberg, “Pretribulational Rapture,” 61.

⁴⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (NASB) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 940, 1168, 1240, 1243, 1263, 1818, 1929. John A. Spoule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1980), 35.

that there is a “narrow” view of DOL and a “broad” view of DOL.⁴⁶ The “narrow” definition includes only the judgment at Christ’s second coming, while the “broad” view includes the entirety of Daniel’s 70th week and the Millennium. In this writer’s opinion, this is not a “both/and” topic. One must choose (1) judgment only or (2) judgment and blessing. This is one theological issue where one cannot have his eschatological cake and eat it too.

What is involved with your view of DOL?

1. *Terminus a quo* – The last part of David’s 70th week
2. *Terminus ad quem* – The very end of Daniel’s 70th week
3. Duration – Days or possibly a few weeks
4. Frequency – Twice
 - a. Last part of Daniel’s 70th week
 - b. Last part of the Millennium
5. Nature – Judgment and wrath only

Why should this view of DOL be considered?

1. This is the only DOL view that corresponds to the historical OT paradigm of (1) multiple occurrences and (2) involving judgment only (although blessing at times can be a result, a subsequent experience).
2. This is the only DOL view that allows for the OT/NT precursors to DOL.
3. This DOL view, when used in 1 Thessalonians 5/2 Thessalonians 2, minimizes problems for pretribulationism, e.g. trying to make ἀποστασία the rapture or trying to eliminate the precursors.
4. In so doing, this DOL view strengthens the case for a Pretribulation Rapture.⁴⁷

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Summary

Numerous attempts have been made to explain the origin of DOL from its alleged pre-prophetic history either without or within Palestine. The truth is that there is no substantial evidence for this supposed origin prior to the prophets.⁴⁸ The DOL idea was considered peculiar to the prophets and the

⁴⁶ Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, rev.ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 232–33; Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 39.

⁴⁷ See Richard L. Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulational Rapture?”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 13(Fall 2002): 241–53.

⁴⁸ For a detailed treatment of this subject see Mayhue, “Prophet’s Watchword,” 34–54 (doctoral diss.). Also see Hans M. Barstad, “Religious Polemics in Amos 5,” *Vetus Testamentum*, xxxiv (Leiden: Brill, 1984): 89–93; Yair Hoffman, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” *Zeitschrift Für die Altesamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1981): 37–50; Michael S. Moore, “Yahweh’s Day,” *Restoration Quarterly* 29:4 (1987): 193–208; Willem A.

apostles, thus its study was limited to the nineteen explicit statements in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament.

The Hebrew concept of time was normally oriented towards quality not quantity and DOL is no exception. The DOL was presented by the prophets as a day of undetermined length which uniquely belongs to Yahweh for judgment.⁴⁹

The Old Testament uses of DOL involved the near prophetic and far eschatological perspectives. At times they were compressed together into one text. The context alone enables the interpreter to separate the multiple fulfillments. Near prophetic expressions of DOL included God's judgment of Israel by Assyria, of Judah by Babylon, of Egypt by Babylon, and of Edom. The far event is yet future and will occur twice—once at the end of the Tribulation period and once at the end of the Millennium.

Obadiah and Joel proved to be the *loci classici* of this study. This following model was inductively developed.

1. DOL combines near and far eschatological truth in one context.
2. DOL involves a singular national application in the near view.
3. DOL involves an international application in the far view.
4. DOL consists of judgment and destruction to the godless.
5. The restoration of Israel is a result in the far view but is not evident in the near.
6. The near includes a preview of what the far will involve and guarantees its occurrence.
7. It argues from the lesser (near) to the greater (far).
8. The prominent mention of DOL in both Testaments refers to the posttribulational event.
9. The establishment of God's kingdom and eternity future promptly follow the last expression of DOL.

The New Testament picked up where the Old concluded. Because the near fulfillments were then history, neither Paul nor Peter mentioned them. They did focus on the far fulfillment which concludes both the Tribulation period and the Millennium. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul added significant new material to that already known about DOL from the Old Testament. Peter's second epistle introduced the final DOL occurrence which ends the Millennium and prepares for eternity future. Therefore no basis exists for beginning DOL with the Rapture nor for extending it through the Millennium. Future expectations involve two fulfillments, each of which will be God's judgment.

VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 214–25, 482–84, ns. 6–33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55–68.

The blessings that follow in each instance are logical progressions, not inherent features.

Five precursors to DOL are provided by Scripture.

1. Elijah's Coming (Mal 4:5)
2. The Apostasy (2 Thess 2:3)
3. The Revelation of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3–4)
4. The Valley of Jehoshaphat Gathering (Joel 3:14)
5. Stellar Signs (Joel 2:31)

These antecedent activities conclusively demand that DOL in its tribulational expression be limited to the very end of the Tribulation.

DOL has very often been identified with the Pauline use of the Day of Christ (DOC) or its several variations. Context becomes the deciding factor. The context of DOC passages is always blessing expected when believers are held accountable before Christ at the Bema. These two prophetic events are to be distinguished, not equated.⁵⁰ Also, “the Lord’s day in Revelation 1:10 refers to the first day of the week (Sunday), not to DOL.⁵¹

Conclusions

The DOL is a generic Biblical phrase which was used by God’s prophets to describe the immediate historical future or the ultimate eschatological consummation. It is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers to only one event in God’s plan.

It is clear, however, that God’s judgment on Judah and the nations took place more than once in Old Testament times and that there always emerged from it a purified people who embraced his covenant terms of salvation. It is equally true that the judgments and restorations of historical times did not exhaust what the prophets had in view, but that there yet remains a climactic and final encounter between the Lord and all humankind in which judgment and salvation will find ultimate expression.⁵²

The DOL is a multiple fulfillment term which is limited in occurrences only by its mention in Biblical revelation. Each appearance of DOL must be interpreted in its context to determine if the prophet expected the immediate act of God in history or Yahweh’s ultimate eschatological visitation.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 135–47.

⁵¹ Ibid., 147–51.

⁵² Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 457.

The DOL is not bound to a definite time duration. It could last for hours or it could continue for days. Only context can determine DOL longevity and then only general approximations can be made. Nowhere does Scripture give a DOL time measurement.

The DOL primarily involves judgment either against Israel or upon the rebellious world population individually and collectively. Where blessing is an attendant feature (and it is not always), it is a chronological sequel not an inherent feature. God's judgments can be either providential (Ezek 30:3, 10) or direct (2 Pet 3:10).

The imminent historical occurrences of DOL point to and anticipate the indeterminate eschatological DOL. At times they are included in one passage (Isa 13:6, 9; Zeph 1:7, 14).

Two times of divine judgment, called DOL by Scripture, yet remain for planet earth—the crescendo judgment which climaxes the Tribulation period (2 Thess 2:2) and the consummation judgment which closes the annals of earth's fallen history (2 Pet 3:10).

Dispensational theology is merely a descriptive term applied to the scheme of theology which is inductively systematized from the Bible. Therefore, it should be continually subject to change and sharpening where Scripture warrants. DOL is one such subject that has needed meaningful review and rethinking.

This article has concluded that:

1. DOL involves judgment only, not judgment and blessing.
2. DOL will yet occur twice in God's prophetic plan, not once.
3. DOL occurs at the end of the Tribulation period, not throughout its duration.
4. DOL occurs at the end of the Millennium, not throughout its duration.
5. DOL as defined in this article does not necessarily prove Pretribulationism, but it certainly and easily allows for it.
6. DOL as defined in the article strongly supports "futuristic Premillennialism."

The correct expression and explanation of DOL will not necessarily lead into all eschatological truth or verify a theological system as true, but it will provide a clearer perspective on one primary facet of the prophetic jewel. This article has sought to contribute to a more precise understanding of DOL. Thus, it should exegetically enhance the viability of the dispensational approach to understanding future events in Scripture.