

The Gospel of the Kingdom as Motivation for Repentance:

A study of the Day of the Lord and its Influence on Evangelism

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"For Yahweh of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased." Isaiah 2.12

Introduction

This paper was inspired by the phrase "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3.2; 4.17; Mark 1.15). There are perhaps more questions generated in the mind of the modern reader than there are words in this simple gospel catchphrase. "What is the kingdom of heaven?" "What does it mean that this kingdom is near?" "Has the kingdom already come?" "Did Jesus get it wrong?" "Why should the nearness of the kingdom be a reason for repentance?" "What about the death, burial, and resurrection?" "What does it mean to repent?" "What happens if one does not repent?" It is beyond the scope of this paper to answer all of these questions; however, I would like to focus on two of them: "What is the kingdom?" and "Why does its nearness inspire repentance?"

The curious issue with the phrase "kingdom of God"¹ is that it is never found in the Hebrew Bible.² Thus, we are faced with two distinct possibilities: (1) Jesus is introducing a new concept, (2) Jesus is using his own phraseology to refer to something his hearers would easily recognize from the Hebrew Scriptures. Since Jesus never took the time to define "the kingdom of God" as he used the term, we are left to assume that his hearers would have already been familiar with the notion.

Fortunately, it is not difficult to arrive at the meaning from a study of the Old Testament. Five elements that roughly encompass the concept as defined in the Hebrew Bible are: (1) the rule of God on earth through his agent—the Messiah (Psalm 2.6–8; Isaiah 11.1–5; Daniel 7.13–14), (2) the inheriting of the land by Abraham and his descendants forever (Genesis 17.8; 26.3; 28.13)³, (3) the reestablishment of the throne of David in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 17.11–14; Psalm 89.35–37; Ezekiel 37.24), (4) the restoration of the planet (reversing the effects of the fall and the flood) (Isaiah 11.6–9; 35.1–10), and (5) the restoration of morality in humankind (no more war, violence, stealing, or other forms of wickedness) (Jeremiah 31.33–34; Micah 4.1–3). However, as I have contemplated Jesus' gospel language, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near," I have been left at a loss to understand why the arrival of paradise would cause men to repent.

¹ Kingdom of God = Kingdom of Heaven (cp. Matthew 19.23 & 24).

² The closest one can find to "the kingdom of God" is in Daniel 2.44 where it says, "in the days of those kings the **God of heaven** will set up a **kingdom** which will never be destroyed..."

³ Inheriting the land has been extended to the Gentiles because of what Jesus has done in breaking down the barrier between us (the law) and thereby making the Gentiles fellow heirs of the promises (Matthew 5.5; Romans 11.17-25; Galatians 3.29; Eph 2.11-20; 1 Peter 2.11).

It is my hypothesis that these five elements of the kingdom of God are lacking something significant.⁴ As I have searched through the Scriptures to find this missing ingredient (that makes the gospel a matter of repentance not simply acceptance), I came across a plethora of “Day of the Lord” texts. It is the intention of this paper to discuss the dark side of the kingdom—the coming judgment of the wicked—in order to fill in the definition of the kingdom of God a bit more as well as answer the question, “Why is the nearness of the kingdom a cause for repenting?” First, I would like to talk about the problem with the world, then look at the passages that speak about the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament, see what changes have been made by Jesus and the apostles, and finally focus on how all this relates to the proclamation of the gospel then and now.

The problem with the world today

The world is sick. Corruption in government, natural disasters, wars, violence, child abuse, rape, murder, thievery, dishonesty, poverty, prostitution, greed, and disease are commonplace. Many take one look at the world and conclude that there is no God. This position is certainly understandable; yet, the Bible gives insight into why the world is so desperately wicked. God is not now ruling the world.⁵ Satan has been given the domain of all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4.6). He is called “the god of this age” because he is ruling now (2 Cor 4.4). This is not limited to one region or country, but the whole world lies in his power (1 John 5.19). Worst of all, he has deceived the whole world (Rev 12.9) to such an extent that most do not even think there is a devil or demons.

Once one comes to understand that Satan is ruling the kingdoms of this world, then the evil in the world starts to make sense. If God were in charge, then crimes would be punished swiftly, and righteousness would be rewarded. However, this is not what is happening today. The world is so afflicted because it is dominated by one who actively prowls around seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5.8). He has worked for millennia to contrive social and political systems by which people may be deceived into thinking that what God says is wrong.

All humans are born dead in trespasses and sins, and all are by nature children of wrath. Everyone lives according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience. Naturally, one follows after the lusts of his or her flesh and indulges in those desires both in thought and action (Ephesians 2.1–3). Like choking smog, the thoughts of Satan imbibe everyone who has not been supernaturally cleansed. The educational, cultural, political, and economic systems of the kingdoms of this world serve to conspire against one coming to know the truth which would set them free from the bondage of sin. Satan has worked and continues to work through the spirits allied with him to deceive.

One of the most important tenets of the worldview of Jesus is cosmic dualism. This concept of dualism contrasts the forces of good against those of evil. There are two ages: the present

⁴ If you are not familiar with these five elements and would like to study more on them, please visit us on the web: www.kingdomready.org/topics/kg.php

⁵ Revelation 11.15-17 indicates that at the seventh trumpet when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God and his Christ, God will begin to reign.

evil age and the age to come. There are two ways to follow: the narrow way which ends in life and the broad way which leads to destruction. There are two Lords one can follow: Jesus the anointed of God and Satan the cursed of God. There are two kinds of people: the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one. There are two sets of helpers: angels used by God to liberate and aid and demons used by Satan to incarcerate and harm. According to this belief, one is never in both categories, and there is no gray area.

Freedom comes through the gospel, which functions as an oxygen mask to save us while we still live in this toxic environment.⁶ In this age the evil prosper, and the righteous suffer. Those who are God's have crucified their desires and have adopted God's desires. In fact, as imitators of God (Ephesians 5.1), we love what he loves and hate what he hates. So, as it pains God to see evil, it should pain us. In this case, we are in a state of perpetual suffering until things are made right. Thus, a major part of the hope for the people of God is the judgment of the wicked and their ruler, Satan.

Even though some may be rescued from the gripping influence of Satan, most will remain in his firm grasp, all the while thinking that they are thinking independently. As these two groups collide with each other violent reactions occur like two volatile chemicals. The holiness of the children of God offends the children of Satan like a bright light shining into their half closed eyes (John 3.19–20). The unrighteous malign Christians calling them “narrow-minded” or “bigots” or “intolerant.” As the kingdom worldview has collided with the world's paradigm, persecution and martyrdom have been the result. Jesus wisely warned all who would be his disciples that they would suffer and be hated because God has called them out of the world. Untold thousands of saints have been murdered throughout the centuries for their uncompromising faith. Christianity today rests upon a legacy of sacrificial bloodshed in keeping with the spirit of the founder's supreme example on the cross.⁷

As this present age spirals towards its culmination, persecution will increase exponentially. The suffering of the saints will not be haphazard but organized under the auspices of the Antichrist and his supporters. This violent storm will make the persecution under Diocletian or the drowning of the Anabaptists look like a sun shower. Indeed, the world will unite in its hatred for what God loves. As war is waged against the disciples of Christ, most who confess Christianity in name alone will fall away and join those who would rather enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season than suffer. Then, just when all hope looks lost and the immense forces of evil are going to overcome the flickering specks of light, suddenly and dramatically God will act. Jesus taught that in the end “the history of the world would come to a screeching halt, that God would intervene in the affairs of this planet, overthrow the forces of evil in a cosmic act of judgment, and establish his utopian Kingdom here on earth.”⁸ Since this final act of God will

⁶ Yet, it is only freedom from Satan's effect on us, and not until the end will true freedom be granted when Satan is imprisoned and then destroyed

⁷ Jesus died for those who hated him while asking God to forgive them rather than punish them. Is this not the model we are to emulate in regards to our enemies? Does not the Cross teach us what is meant by the phrase “love your enemies” (Matthew 5.44).

⁸ Jesus: The Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, Bart Ehrman, page 3, 1999 Oxford University Press, Inc.

occur in real space and time, it begins on a real day, and that day in the Scriptures is called “the Day of Yahweh” or “the Day of the Lord.”

The Day of the Lord defined from the Hebrew prophets

The prophets of ancient Israel spoke vociferously of the coming destruction of the wicked. Sometimes this proclamation was focused on the enemies of Israel and other times it was focused on Israel herself. The prophets painted the dismal picture of the Day of the Lord using many hues of gray. As we will see, this Day was proclaimed as a grotesque and grisly nightmare from which there was seemingly no escape. We shall turn now to the prophets themselves and allow them to speak.

The Day of Yahweh will come with clouds and thick darkness (Joel 2.1–2). It will be a Day of wrath, trouble, distress, destruction, desolation, and gloom (Zephaniah 1.15). God will arise in the splendor of his majesty to make heaven and earth tremble in the fury of his burning anger (Isaiah 2.19; 13.9, 13). There will be famine (Joel 1.16). Cosmic signs accompany this judgment to the degree that neither sun nor moon nor stars will shed light (Isaiah 13.10; 34.4; Joel 2.10; 3.15).

Men will be so frightened that they will scurry into caves and dive into holes in the ground to escape (Isaiah 2.21). They will say to the mountains, “Cover us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!” (Hosea 10.8). Even hardened warriors will cry out bitterly (Zephaniah 1.14). Pains and anguish will take hold of pale faced men causing them to writhe like a woman in labor (Isaiah 13.8; Joel 2.6). The whole world will be punished for its evil, for its disregard for what God has said is right, for its arrogance and ruthlessness (Isaiah 13.11).

The coming cataclysm is not limited to one or two countries, for Yahweh’s wrath is against all nations and their armies (Isaiah 34.2; Ezekiel 30.3; Joel 3.12; Obadiah 1.15). He will command an army of mighty warriors to execute his anger (Isaiah 13.3–4; Joel 2.11). This army will be unlike anything that has ever come before it, and never again will there be anything like it (Joel 2.2). The earth quakes as fire consumes before them, and behind then a flame burns (Joel 2.3, 10). The army is God’s instrument of indignation which he will use to decimate the land and exterminate the sinners from it (Isaiah 13.5, 9). God will utterly destroy the armies of the earth, and their corpses will be strewn about drenching the mountains with their blood (Isaiah 34.3). Because they have sinned against Yahweh, their blood will be poured out like dirt and their flesh scattered like manure (Zephaniah 1.17). So thorough will this judgment be that the earth will be depopulated to a point that mankind is scarcer than gold (Isaiah 13.12). Yet, there are some who will survive (Isaiah 14.2; Joel 2.32; Obadiah 1.17).

The proud will be humbled, and Yahweh alone will be exalted (Isaiah 2.12). Not even the riches of the wealthy will help them in escaping the destruction (Zephaniah 1.18). The Day of Yahweh will be especially dark for those who think that they are innocent by association (Amos 5.18). For them, the judgment of God will be like one who escapes a lion and a bear catches him; or perhaps he finds his way home unmolested and leans his hand on the wall to catch his breath, and a snake bites him (Amos 5.19). All will be beckoned to come to the valley of decision where judgment will be passed (Joel 3.14). Even those who are stagnant, neither violent nor righteous, will be sought out and punished (Zephaniah 1.12). Those who are in

power, who wear the garments of royalty, will be punished (Zephaniah 1.8). The wealthy will have their money stripped away from them, and their houses will become desolate (Zephaniah 1.13).

The Day of Vengeance will be to those who are afflicted, brokenhearted, and imprisoned a favorable year, a time of comfort and joy (Isaiah 34.8; 61.1-3). Those who call on the name of Yahweh in this time of distress will escape this wrath (Joel 2.32).

The purpose of proclaiming the Day of the LORD is that men would repent

Why did these prophets speak in such a terrifying manner? The purpose of preaching the imminent destruction of the wicked was to splash cold water onto the faces of lethargic sinners. The message shocked men into responding. On the heels of a "Day of the Lord" section, one will typically find a call for repentance.

The prophets urged the people to respond with wailing to their message (Isaiah 13.6; Jeremiah 25.34; Ezekiel 30.2; Joel 1.5, 8, 10, 13). Joel said, "Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty" (Joel 1.15). He requests that the warning be sounded so that all will know that the day of Yahweh is coming (Joel 2.1). Joel appeals to the people to repent:

"Yet even now," declares Yahweh, "
Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;
And rend your heart and not your garments."
Now return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness
And relenting of evil.
Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent
And leave a blessing behind Him,
Even a grain offering and a drink offering
For Yahweh your God? (Joel 2:12-14)

Now is the time to blow the trumpet, fast, gather the people, and come before the altar to weep and ask God to spare his people (Joel 2.15-17). Then, Yahweh will forgive and have compassion on his people and pardon them (Joel 2.18-19). This sentiment is shared by Zephaniah:

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather,
O nation without shame,
Before the decree takes effect—
The day passes like the chaff—
Before the burning anger of Yahweh comes upon you,
Before the day of Yahweh's anger comes upon you.
Seek Yahweh,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of Yahweh's anger. (Zephaniah 2.1-3)

Following these pleas for repentance are wonderful passages promising restoration (the restoration is sometimes conditional on the people's repentance). A prophetic template emerges from our study so far: (1) conviction of sin⁹ (2) preaching about the coming Day of the Lord (3) urging the people to repent, and (4) sharing a vision of restoration. This procedure is not exactly followed by each book of prophecy, but the ingredients reappear frequently. Usually, the restoration texts with which Kingdom believers are so familiar begin right after the wrath of God has been proclaimed. Thus, repentance is often squished between these two contrasting themes. The indignation of Yahweh approaches, everyone must repent in order to survive, and then the remnant will enjoy restoration. "The establishment of a remnant of a pious Israel was the germ of the hope of the Messianic kingdom; and the Day of Jehovah itself became the Day of Judgment, which figures so largely in both Jewish and Christian Messianism. In fact, it is not too much to say that the eschatology of Judaism is really a development of the implications of the prophetic teaching as to the Day of Jehovah."¹⁰ Before we will turn to the Greek Scriptures to see if this theme has been dropped, changed, or expanded upon, we need first to consider how this concept appears in the book of Daniel.

From the Day of the Lord to the kingdom of God via Daniel

Daniel provides the necessary glue between "the Day of Yahweh" terminology and "the kingdom of God" phrase which is found so often in the New Testament (especially on the lips of Jesus). Although the phrase "Day of the Lord" does not appear in the book of Daniel, the concept is undeniably present. For example, the kingdom of God obliterates the kingdoms of the world like a huge rock smashing into a statue (Daniel 2.34–35; 44). Even so, Daniel does not focus on the wrath of God coming on the wicked; rather, his perspective is almost exclusively focused on the righteous. For example, in chapter seven, he sees a series of kingdoms in a vision. The last kingdom before the Son of Man comes is worldwide in scope and influenced heavily by "the little horn." This person not only speaks out boastfully against the Highest One, but he also actively persecutes, wages war against, and overpowers the saints (Daniel 7.20–21, 25). However, this last kingdom will be crushed by the Son of Man when he comes in glory and power:

"And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and *men of every language* Might
serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed." (Daniel 7.14)

⁹ Although we have not covered this element, it is clear that many of the prophets began with a laundry list of sins that the people were committing, followed by a denunciation of this behavior (cf. Isaiah 1).

¹⁰ Shailer Mathews, "Day of the Lord," Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, ed James Hastings, Hendrickson Publishers, 2001, pg. 179.

Then the kingdom will be given to the saints of the Most High to possess it forever (Daniel 7.18, 22, 27). So we conclude that although Daniel primarily focuses on the destiny of the righteous (including tribulation and vindication at the coming of the Son of Man), he nevertheless understands that in order for the kingdom of God to have dominion, all other kingdoms must be crushed.

Day of the Lord with John the Baptist and Jesus

Unlike Daniel, John the Baptist focused on the unrepentant and what they needed to do in light of the coming kingdom. He does not warn the righteous to endure through the messianic woes (the tribulation) but instead cries out for all to get right with God before the Day comes. He spoke of “fleeing from the wrath to come” (Luke 3.7) and preached about the precarious thread by which God’s wrath hung over everyone’s heads.

“Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3.9).

Even being a descendant of Abraham will not save one from this coming Day. “John the Baptist appears to have preached a message of coming destruction and salvation. Mark portrays him as a prophet in the wilderness, proclaiming the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that God would again bring his people from the wilderness into the Promised Land (Mark 1.2–8). When this happened the first time, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, it meant destruction for the nations already inhabiting the land.”¹¹

This all sounds just like the prophets mentioned earlier. However, John expanded on the traditional “the end of the world is at hand” message by speaking about “the one to come.” As a standard ingredient to his message, John would prophesy about the coming judge.

John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of his sandals; he will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to thoroughly clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3.16-17)

The one who is coming will divide all into one of two categories: the wheat or the chaff. Those deemed wheat will be properly cared for (i.e. enter the kingdom), but the chaff will be burned with “unquenchable fire.” Apparently this coming one, for whom John the Baptist is merely a forerunner, would be the agent of God’s judgment to be carried out on the last Day.¹²

All of this is brought to a climax in John’s ministry when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Jesus did not choose to focus on the traditional interpretation of the law with the Pharisees, he did not emphasize the role of the temple like the Sadducees, he did not take off to the monastic

¹¹ Jesus: The Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, Bart Ehrman, page 138, 1999 Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹² The role of the Messiah on the Day of the Lord is found in some places of the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 11; Psalm 110; Daniel 7; et al.) although it was not nearly as emphasized as it came to be with John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles.

lifestyle of the Essenes, nor did he take up the sword like the Zealots; instead, Jesus associated with John the Baptist, an apocalyptic preacher who called the people to repentance through baptism. The only reasonable explanation for this association (Jesus went to John for baptism) was that Jesus agreed with the message of John.

If this is the case, then one would expect to find “Day of the Lord” material on the lips of Jesus in his preaching ministry. I propose that this is exactly what the phrase that started us on our journey, “repent for the kingdom of God is at hand,” implies. Jesus did not change or marginalize the message of the prophets concerning judgment and restoration; instead, he amplified it and enriched it with full color. Everything Jesus did was an outgrowth of his faith in this coming kingdom of God both the judgment and the restoration.

Jesus sent his disciples out preaching and told them that anyone who rejects this message will be punished more severely than Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 10.15). He proclaimed imprecations on the unbelieving cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida saying that they will be punished more severely than Tyre and Sidon on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 11.21–22). Furthermore, Capernaum will be punished on the Day of Judgment for disbelief despite the miracles done in her (Matthew 11.24). Not only does Jesus invoke “Day of the Lord” pronouncements on cities, but each individual will be judged by the every careless word spoken as well (Matthew 12.36–37). In fact, the door to the kingdom is narrow, and most who try to enter will not be able; once it is closed, there is no admittance (Luke 13.24–25). Those who fail to enter will be outside weeping and gnashing their teeth because they will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but they will be thrown out (Luke 24.28–29).

In the parables of both the tares and wheat and also the dragnet, the climax occurs at the end of the age when the Son of Man commands his angels to separate the wicked from the righteous and burn them in the furnace of fire (Matthew 13.40–43, 49–50). It is apparent also in Jesus’ view of the end that the saints will be persecuted first and that after this tribulation, the darkening of the sky will occur, and then the Son of Man comes (Matthew 24.29). Of note is the predicted response to the coming of the Son of Man: “all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matthew 24.30, cp. Rev 1.7). Although the elect will be gathered together at the coming of the Son of Man, the wicked will be punished. His coming puts an end to their rebellion, and that is why they are so upset to see him “with power and great glory.”

To the weeping women who followed Jesus as he marched to the place of The Skull Jesus said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23.28-31)

Jesus was completely in agreement with the historic prophetic belief that the Day of Yahweh would be a time of tremendous duress. He alludes to several Hebrew texts when he speaks of the desire people will have to find a cave to hide (cf. Isaiah 2.19; Hosea 10.8; Revelation 6.16).

Jesus was just as apocalyptic, just as emphatic about the coming Day of Judgment as was John the Baptist, Isaiah, Joel, and the others who spoke concerning these things. The only difference is that he understood that it was through the Son of Man and his words that Yahweh would bring about the last Day (John 5.26–29; 12.48). Furthermore, he, like Daniel, also spoke about the righteous enduring a time of great persecution prior to their vindication and possession of the kingdom. In this sense, Jesus shared not only the bad news (Judgment Day is coming for the wicked), but also the good news (that the righteous will enjoy the messianic age with the patriarchs). Now, we shall turn to how the term “Day of Yahweh” or “Day of the Lord” is used in the rest of the New Testament.

Day of the Lord in the rest of the New Testament

“The expectation of the day of the Lord plays a key role in the eschatological [end times] teaching of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 5.5; Acts 2.20; 2 Peter 3.10), where it is usually identified with the expectation of the Parousia, or second coming of Jesus. This identification is possible because the Greek word for ‘Lord’ (*kyrios*) can refer either to YHWH (as in the Septuagint) or to Jesus.”¹³ Furthermore, since the Lord Jesus is the primary agent through which Yahweh acts, the Day of Yahweh can rightfully be called the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ without any contradiction or redefinition of who Yahweh is. It is still the Day of Yahweh, but now since the Messiah has been openly identified as Jesus of Nazareth (i.e. through resurrection cf. Acts 17.31; Romans 1.3), it makes sense to incorporate him in the proclamation of the coming judgment. The incorporation of the Messiah’s role in speaking about the Day of the Lord finds precedent in the Old Testament¹⁴ and can also be seen at Qumran.¹⁵ Here are the different ways that the writers of the Greek Scriptures referred to the Day of Yahweh.

Terminology Used for the Day of the LORD in the New Testament

the day of judgment	Matthew 10.15; 11.22, 24; 12.36; 2 Peter 2.9; 3.7; 1 John 4.17
the day of wrath	Romans 2.5; Revelation 6.17
the day of Christ	Philippians 1.6, 10; 2.16
the day of our Lord Jesus	1 Corinthians 1.8; 2 Corinthians 1.14
the last day	John 6.39–40, 44, 54; 11.24; 12.48
the day of God	2 Peter 3.12; Revelation 16.14
the day	Romans 2.16; 1 Corinthians 3.13
that day	2 Thessalonians 1.10; 2 Timothy 1.12, 18; 4.8

¹³ “day of the Lord” page 151, Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period ed. Jacob Neusner & William Scott Green. Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

¹⁴ Daniel 7.13-14; Isaiah 11

¹⁵ “[May you smite the peoples] with the might of your hand and ravage the earth with your scepter; may you bring death to the ungodly with the breath of your lips...For God has established you as the scepter. The rulers [and all the kings of the] nations shall serve you. He shall strengthen you with his holy Name and you shall be as a [lion; and you shall not lie down until you have devoured the] prey which naught shall deliver.” IQSb V, 25

“The day is pictured primarily as the last judgment, when all people will be tested (1 Corinthians 3.13) and either rewarded (1 Corinthians 1.8) or punished (Romans 2.16).”¹⁶ The destruction in the time of Noah as well as the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of the future coming judgment (2 Peter 2.5–9). Although men may scoff at the notion, the world as we know it will be scorched with fire (2 Peter 3.7). When the Day of the Lord comes, it will be sudden (like a thief); all the works of the earth will be burned up (2 Peter 3.10–12). In fact, as time goes on, the stubborn and unrepentant are storing up for themselves wrath in the Day of the righteous judgment when God renders to each according to his deeds (Romans 2.5–6). The judgment of the last Day falls not only on humans but also on Satan and his demons (2 Peter 2.4; Jude 6; Revelation 20.10). God executes his final wrath through the Son of Man who commands myriads of angels to come in flaming fire to deal out retribution to those who do not obey the gospel (Matthew 13.41–43; 2 Thessalonians 1.7–10; Jude 1.14–15). Though the ungodly should fear, the ones who are like Jesus can have confidence in the Day of Judgment (1 John 4.17). Those in whom God has begun a good work will be able to stand blameless and in glory on the Day of Christ if they continue in the faith (Philippians 1.6–10; 2.16). So the Day of the Lord Jesus has essentially replaced the Day of Yahweh, and it is both a bad day to the unrighteous and a good day to the saints.

Analysis of the gospel proclamation in the New Testament

By now, it should be well established that (1) the prophets of the OT proclaimed the Day of Yahweh—a time of horrendous judgment of the wicked followed by fantastic restoration for the righteous. (2) John the Baptist and Jesus both firmly believed in the coming Day of the Lord and had not in any way watered it down, rather they (with OT precedent) focused on the role that the Son of Man or Messiah would play on that Day. (3) The rest of the New Testament writers believed in this coming Day, and it had already taken on a distinctly Jesuanic character—it became the Day of the Lord Jesus—because Jesus is understood to be the agent through whom Yahweh will execute his Day. Now, I would like to turn to discuss the gospel message proclaimed by John, Jesus, and his disciples to see what role, if any, the Day of the Lord material plays in their evangelism.

As we have already seen, **John the Baptist** is undoubtedly a proclaimer of the coming judgment of God and in particular of the coming one who will separate the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3.7–17). However, is John’s proclamation of coming judgment the same as the preaching of the gospel? This question is answered by Luke at the conclusion of John’s message when he says, “and with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people” (Luke 3.18). Furthermore, Matthew abbreviates what Luke records by saying, “Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 3.1–2). Thus, we conclude that the apocalyptic message concerning the Day of the Lord and in particular the role that “the coming one” plays is indeed the gospel (or at

¹⁶ “Day of the Lord” page 152, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* ed. Jacob Neusner & William Scott Green. Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

least a very significant part of it) and can be summarized by the phrase “the kingdom of God is at hand.”

This is the very same terminology that Matthew used to describe the gospel proclamation of **Jesus the Christ**. The continuity between these two men is unmistakable. John is arrested in Matthew 4.12, and as Jesus arrives in Capernaum, Matthew says in verse 17, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew wants us to connect these two men together not by relation per se but by message. John’s message continued in the preaching of Jesus. Then, just a few verses later (Matthew 4.23), another summary statement appears, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...” Therefore, whatever is concluded regarding John’s usage of the Day of the Lord material in his gospel proclamation should be likewise applied to Jesus. Thinking along these lines yields a remarkable consistency between the prophets of old, John, and Jesus. However, did Jesus change the message during his ministry? In fact, he did not (Matthew 9.23; 24.14). He sent out his disciples bequeathing to them his apocalyptic kingdom message, “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 10.7). Mark insightfully sums up the message preached by the twelve as, “they went out and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6.6).

Peter the Apostle firms up our suspicion that Jesus commissioned the disciples to warn of the coming judgment when he said to Cornelius, “And he [Jesus] ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10.42). Peter faithfully carried out the ministry of Jesus by challenging men to repent in light of the coming Day of the Lord in order that the righteous may be able to partake in the period of “restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3.21).

Even so, it is often alleged (at least since Luther) that **Paul the Apostle** preached a different gospel than what Jesus preached—the gospel of grace. However, this claim is erroneous since Luke equates Paul’s preaching of the kingdom with the gospel of grace (Acts 20.24–25). Nevertheless, we have even more evidence than this to conclude that Paul preached as gospel the imminent destruction of the wicked on the last Day.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17.30-31) .

It is my contention that this is the expanded version of “repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.” Paul calls for repentance but substitutes, “he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world...” for kingdom. This manifests a striking resemblance to the prophetic warnings discussed earlier. More evidence for our proposition can be located in the letter Paul wrote to the Romans. He speaks of the unrepentant “storing up wrath...in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2.5). Those who have repented instead

look forward to immortality, glory,¹⁷ and honor (Romans 2.7, 10). Remarkably, this section of his letter concludes equating the coming judgment with his gospel, when Paul says, “On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Messiah Jesus” (Romans 2.16).

We conclude that the primary information that the unrepentant were confronted with was their own impending ruin because of sin. If this is true, then preaching the gospel is a very dangerous endeavor, because most people will be offended immediately by the notion that their Day of demise draws near. In fact, it is likely that one would suffer persecution if they so preached in modern times.

The principle of godly sorrow leading to repentance in actual experience

The preaching of the gospel inspires repentance. However, why would one want to repent? In light of this question, consider the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7.9-10)

There is a simple chain of action put forth: godly sorrow leads to repentance leads to salvation. As I meditated on this principle, I remembered back to when I first repented. It was a very uncomfortable experience (i.e. I had godly sorrow). In fact, it was painful to come to the gut wrenching realization that my life was a not a fragrant aroma but a repugnant odor in the nostrils of God. When I changed, it was because I came to understand that I was wrong and that if I did not change, I would be miserable.¹⁸ Yet, if I never experienced “godly sorrow,” I would never have repented. Before this time, I had believed that Jesus had died for my sins and rose from the dead. I also had confessed that Jesus was Lord. However, I still lived the same way; my Christianity did not seriously affect my lifestyle. However, once I had godly sorrow and cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” things began to change. Everything was different because I had made a commitment to do what was pleasing in the eyes of God (i.e. I had repented).

Perhaps the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is that when one feels bad for what he has done in the sight of God, he is promised forgiveness (on the basis of the cross of Christ in order to enjoy the restored earth and ruling with Jesus); whereas the worldly sorrow ends in despair.

A prime example of this is found in the sermons Peter preached in the early chapters of Acts. In both of them (the day of Pentecost and the day the lame man was healed), the climax of his preaching was to convict his hearers of the sin they had committed in crucifying Christ

¹⁷ Glory is used in Scripture to refer to the glorious coming kingdom (Daniel 7.13-14; Matthew 24.30).

¹⁸ However, although I didn’t think I would perish, due to my belief that I could not lose my salvation after I had accepted Jesus as my savior

(not literally, but perhaps they were in the crowd shouting “crucify him”). The people came to realize that they had done wrong and cried out “brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s immediate response was to repent. This is a fine example of the “godly sorrow leading to repentance” principle at work.

Putting it all together

The gospel is *not just* that the Messiah is coming to establish the kingdom on earth. The gospel is *not just* that this utopia is nearly here. The gospel is *not just* that with the kingdom comes judgment for the wicked. Nor is it *just* that Jesus died for our sins to enter the kingdom. It is *all* of this *plus* that repentance is necessary. This is all included in the biblical gospel. One must understand the sickness before he desires the cure. But once a chronically ill man (sin is a chronic disease) finds the cure, unspeakable gratitude and joy result. So it is with the repentant sinner who is forgiven, who swings from the dominion of Satan to Christ, who no longer fears judgment because of the love he has experienced at the mercy of a gracious God and an obedient Son. Knowing and serving this perfect God and receiving his outrageous love (through repentance and holy living) put us in a whole new category of mind as John so aptly described:

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that **we may have confidence in the day of judgment**; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4.16-18)

But even once we have understood the gospel as Jesus preached it, another major problem immediately presents itself. How does one cross the chasm between the thought world present at the time of Jesus and that of modernity? Jesus could declare “the kingdom of God is near,” and everyone would understand that he meant both that judgment was near for the wicked and national and individual rewards (inheriting the land etc.) were near for the righteous. However, today, we have so much more work to do. We cannot speak about the kingdom because no one knows what it is, other than that it is “within you” (apparently this is the only text modern Christians connect with the kingdom concept). Furthermore, even defining the kingdom is not sufficient; we must take a couple of steps back. We have to prove that there is a God, that he is one, that the Bible is true, and that there are moral absolutes, all before our preaching can be understood. Nevertheless, that will have to be the subject of another paper. For now, I hope we can be satisfied to know something more about the kingdom (both the judgment and restoration) and how this precious message motivates repentance and prepares the heart to receive forgiveness through the Cross. May we echo the sentiment of the Qumran community as we proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

“[Rise up, O Hero!
Lead off Thy captives, O Glorious One!
Gather up] Thy spoils, O Author of mighty deeds!
Lay Thy hand on the neck of Thine enemies

and Thy feet [on the pile of the slain!
Smite the nations, Thine adversaries],
and devour flesh with Thy sword!
Fill Thy land with glory
and Thine inheritance with blessing!
[Let there be a multitude of cattle in Thy fields,
and in] Thy palaces
[silver and gold and precious stones]!

O Zion, rejoice greatly!
Rejoice all you cities of Judah!
[Keep your gates ever open
that the] hosts of the nations [may be brought in]!
Their kings shall serve you
and all your oppressors shall bow down before you;
[they shall lick the dust of your feet.
Shout for joy, O daughters of] my people!
Deck yourselves with glorious jewels
[and rule over the kingdom of the nations!
Sovereignty shall be to the Lord]
and everlasting dominion to Israel." (1QM XIX, 2-8)