Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

Day of the Lord, God, Christ, the

The Day as Salvation. While the judgment dimension is dominant in descriptions of the day of the Lord, the salvation dimension, although less emphasized, is nevertheless present. Some metaphors for the day are negative. Other metaphors are positive. It is a time of return to paradise (Isa 35:1-10). The mountains will drip with new wine and the hills will flow with milk (Joel 3:18). The setting is as a day of abundant harvest (Joel 2:24).

The day of the Lord brings salvation for Israel. Drought and disaster drive Israel to their knees. They cry for God's mercy (Joel 2:17), and he answers. Salvation follows judgment. God forcibly and effectively removes the enemy (2:20). Salvation consists in abundance of grain, new wine, and oil, "enough to satisfy you fully" (2:19; cf. Joel 2:24Joel 2:26). In the words of Zephaniah, God will "restore their [Judah's] fortunes" (2:7), an expression that implies the restoration of a desirable situation, a recovery of what has been lost. To God's saving activity will belong his pouring forth of his Spirit on all people (Joel 2:29). In the words of Zephaniah, "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love" (3:17). It will mean that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32).

In the New Testament the day of the Lord is more precisely the day of Jesus Christ and especially the manifestation of his glory. While this revelation of the person of Jesus spells calamity for unbelievers, for believers it means to be caught up to be with Christ their redeemer forever (1 Thess 4:13-5:3). Such a prospect leads to joyous expectation and fervor. With this prospect and other promises in mind, Paul urges Christians to persevere (1 Cor 1:8).

The day of the Lord portends salvation for the nations. Announcements about favorable prospects for Gentiles, while considerable, are not often found in conjunction with language about the day of the Lord. Still, pictures of Gentile response given elsewhere (such as Psalm 96) are reinforced by Zephaniah's classic description of the day of the Lord: "From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings" (3:10; cf. 3:9). The same prophet also portrays nations, each in their own place, bowing down to the Lord (2:11). Such a day is on the far side of the day of judgment, a situation true for peoples generally but also for the individual. Paul urges the church at Corinth to discipline the immoral person so that at the day of the Lord his spirit may be saved (1 Cor 5:5).

The day of the Lord will transform nature. For God's people, Israel, the day of the Lord will mean physical abundance and spiritual blessing. Nature will be affected. Joel addresses an oracle to the earth, calling on it not to fear, and promises that it will be fertile and productive (2:22) so that threshing floors will be filled with grain and vats will overflow with new wine (2:24). Although the new heaven and earth are not in the Old Testament specifically connected to the day of the Lord (Isa 65:17-25), that connection is made in 2 Peter 3:13. The old world has passed away to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth.