Isaiah - Commentaries by Paul Wilson

Prophetic Terms, Prophetic Terms: The Day of the Lord

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

In this paper we come to the subject of the "day of the Lord" which will follow the days of "apostasy" and "great tribulation." The troubles of the "great tribulation" will be terrible, and will end with the Lord coming personally to execute judgment. He will come to cleanse this world by taking vengeance on them that know not God, preparatory to setting up His kingdom on earth. Some have confused the "day of the Lord" with His coming for His saints, but this should not be done. When He comes to usher in the "day of the Lord," His saints will come with Him. When He appears in glory, they will appear with Him (see Jude 14, 15, and Col. 3:4). Previously (that is, before the "apostasy" and the "great tribulation"), He will have come and called His redeemed from the earth and the tomb, according to 1 Thessalonians 4.

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of the "day of the Lord" as a time of judgment and darkness for the earth. Let us notice some of the verses from the Old Testament:

"The day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness.... For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:1-11.)

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." (Mal. 4:1-5.)

"The day of the LORD... is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm." (Zeph. 1:14-16.)

"The day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.... And they shall go into the holes of the rocks. and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." (Isa. 2:12-19.)

Many other verses of the Old Testament also tell of the time when the Lord Himself shall come to judge the earth. At that time His enemies, called in Acts 2 His foes, shall be made His footstool. What a serious thing it is to be an enemy of Christ! Since the death of the Lord Jesus at the hand of man, there can be no neutrality with regard to Him; one is either on the Lord's side—for Christ—or against Him. Reader, are you a friend or a foe?

In the New Testament the Lord Himself foretold His coming in judgment. The words of Matt. 24:27-30 are plain:

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.... Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul had to instruct these young Christians in the truth of the Lord's coming to take His saints away from the earth before the judgment. These newly saved ones were distressed because some of their number had died before the Lord came, so the Spirit of God sent this word to them, explaining how the dead in Christ shall be raised, and the living believers caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This will not be at the "day of the Lord," but will take place some time before it. Then in the 5th chapter of this epistle, they are informed of the "day of the Lord" that will be subsequent on the Lord's coming for His own.

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

From this verse we learn that even in the midst of all the troubles of the "great tribulation," men will be working on plans for world improvement, and for the insurance of peace to a ravaged world. They will become quite confident of the success of their plans, and will prophesy "Peace and safety" only to find their hopes dashed to pieces by the coming of the Son of man to execute judgment on His enemies. God will be left out of their plans, and their destruction will be swift and sudden.

What a contrast the "day of the Lord" will be to man's day of the present! Even now man's will is paramount, and God is left out. In that day, with all the Christians gone from the world, it will have become utterly godless and apostate. But the day will come when Christ, once rejected here, will return with His saints to execute judgment. He is despised and rejected now, but the day will come when all must own His rightful sway.

After Paul had written his first letter to these young Christians at Thessalonica, they became further troubled. This time their trouble was concerning the "day of the Lord." They had been passing through troubles as a result of their testimony for Christ. They were suffering persecutions, and were tempted into believing that the reason they were having so much trouble was that they were passing through the "day of the Lord." This was not true, and Paul wrote his second letter to correct the error. In the second chapter he says:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [the word "by" is in italics and does not belong here] our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, not by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ [most translators render it "Lord" here instead of "Christ"] is at hand" (or more correctly, "is present").

He beseeches them not to be worried by this false report, and calls to their remembrance "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and... our gathering together unto Him." This is to precede the "day of the Lord." They had been instructed in Paul's first letter about how the Lord will come in the clouds and call the saints to meet Him in the air. This hope should be their comfort and stay. The fictitious report said that the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" had actually come—that it was already present, not merely that it was at hand or imminent. This threw them into consternation (remember it bore the forged name of the Apostle to accredit it) for they understood that the "day of the Lord" was to be a terrible time. They no doubt knew some of the Old Testament prophecies which we have just noticed, so we can well understand their troubled state on hearing such a report.

After reminding them of the coming of the Lord as their own hope, the Apostle Paul goes on to explain that the "day of the Lord" cannot come until after certain other things take place. The "apostasy" and the revelation of the "man of sin" must precede the coming of the Lord to execute judgment. Surely He will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel. His coming in judgment, bringing in the "day of the Lord," is a certainty; but no Christian should be troubled by it, for he will be gone from the scene first to be with Christ, and will come back with Christ in that day.

We might borrow an illustration from another. Suppose a certain city in revolt against their rightful king. The king then gathers an army together to go and punish the rebels. But there are some there who are still loyal to their king, and to them the king sends word that he will first come to a designated place outside of the city and call all those who are loyal to meet him there. He says further, that not one shot shall be fired before they are called out of the doomed city. They are not then to be troubled by false reports that he has already come and the destruction begun, but to calmly await his call to meet him. He also promises his faithful ones that when he does go to execute vengeance they shall accompany him.

The second epistle of Peter also speaks of the coming of the "day of the Lord" as a thief. A thief comes without warning and never for good, so the "day of the Lord" shall come on the godless world very unexpectedly for judgment.

Peter, speaking by the Spirit of God, goes further and tells of events that will take place even after the thousand-year peaceful reign of Christ. He speaks of the dissolution of the present earth and heavens at the close of the "day of the Lord." Thus we see that the "day of the Lord" will usher in the reign of Christ on earth and continue throughout and even beyond it, to the ushering in of the "day of God"—the eternal state, with new heavens and new earth.

clickbible.org