

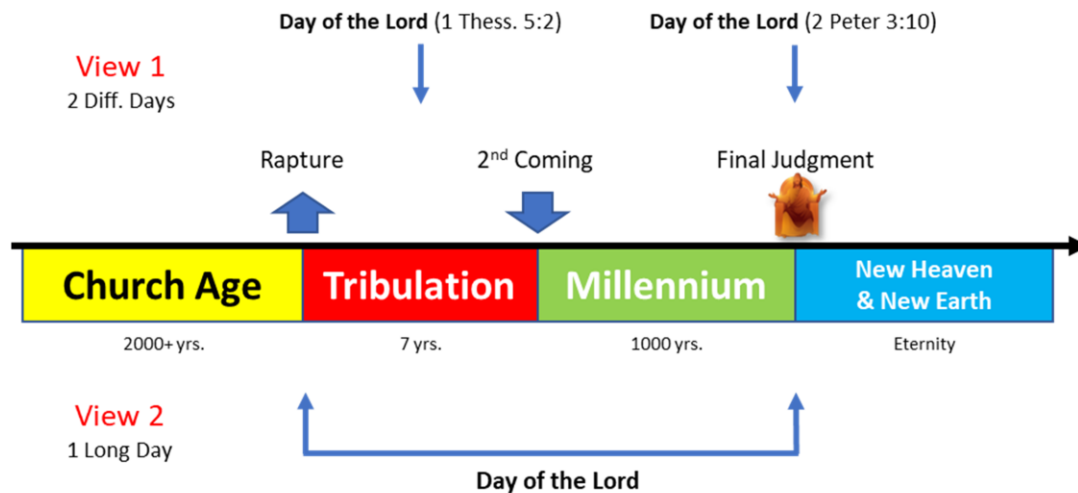
The Day of the Lord

by Pete and Rachael Wrue

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WHAT IS THE DAY of the Lord? Depending on who you ask, you will get different answers. For example, J. Vernon McGee believed the day of the Lord is an extended period of time that includes the seven-year tribulation and the one thousand years of the millennial kingdom.¹ Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson believe the day of the Lord has different meanings in the New Testament; in 1 Thessalonians 5 it refers to the seven-year tribulation, and in 2 Peter 3 it refers to the destruction of the present universe (after the millennium).² John MacArthur believes the day of the Lord will occur in two phases, but he seems to be saying the first phase is the judgment at the end of the seven-year tribulation (2nd Coming), and the second phase is the judgment at the end of the millennium.³

There is a lot of confusion among our dispensational friends regarding this term (and its use in verses such as 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and 2 Peter 3:10). They basically have two main views or schools of thought: 1) that the day of the Lord has two different meanings in the New Testament (broken up into the judgment of the tribulation and the judgment at the end of the millennium), or 2) the day of the Lord is one really long day that lasts for 1,007 years. The chart below shows the two different views:



Because dispensationalists believe Christ returns at the beginning of the millennium, and 2 Peter 3 describes the day of the Lord as the *passing of heaven and earth* (which doesn't happen until the END of the millennium), they insist 2 Peter 3 is *not* describing the second coming. However, the context of the passage is clearly the Second Coming (vv. 3-4), thus placing Christ's return at the *end* of the millennium, not the beginning. Their premillennial view of the return of Christ forces them to treat 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10 differently, even though *both* verses use the phrase "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night":

*For you yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*** (1 Thess 5:2)

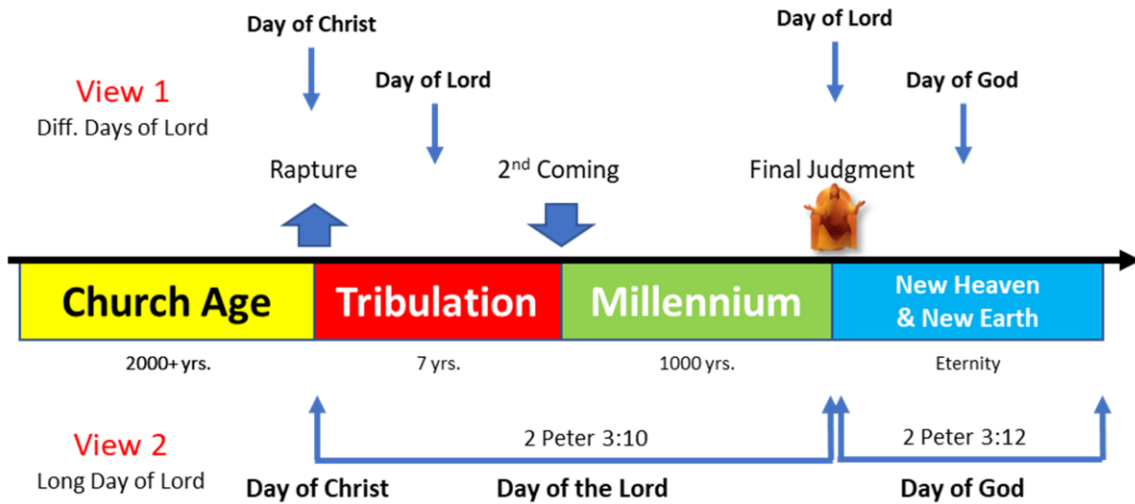
*But **the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,** in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.* (2 Pet 3:10)

To further complicate matters, many dispensationalists also believe the day of the **Lord**, the day of **Christ**, and the day of **God**, all refer to different days or events. They generally believe the day of Christ is the **rapture**, the day of the Lord is the **7-year tribulation period**, and the day of God refers to the **eternal state** following the millennium. For example, in his commentary, John MacArthur gives examples of Scriptures that refer to the day of the Lord vs. the day of Christ. He lists 2 Thessalonians 2:2 as a day of the **Lord** verse, but Philippians 1:10 as a day of **Christ** verse. J. Vernon McGee also states in his commentary that 2 Thessalonians 2:2 should be translated as day of the **Lord** rather than the day of **Christ**. While some versions do translate 2 Thessalonians 2:2 as "*day of the Lord*," this verse and Philippians 1:10 *both* use the same Greek word *Christos*. It's absurd to insist that these verses are talking about two different "days":

*not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though **the day of Christ** [Christos] had come.* (2 Thess 2:2)

*that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the **day of Christ** [Christos].* (Phil 1:10)

Many dispensational teachers also differentiate between the day of the **Lord** in 2 Peter 3:10 and the day of **God** in 2 Peter 3:12. There are two possible charts for this, depending on whether they see the day of the Lord as two separate days or one long day. See below:



Even though these are two different Greek words in 2 Peter 3 (*Kurios* and *Theos*), it is very clear from the passage that these words are being used interchangeably:

“But the day of the Lord [Kurios] will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God [Theos], because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Pet 3:10-12)

No wonder our dispensational friends are so confused about eschatology. Thankfully, it is not that complicated. The day of the Lord, the day of God, the day of Christ, the day of judgment, etc., are ALL referring to same thing in the New Testament.

So, what is it? The **Day of the Lord** is a judgment of God on a nation or people group. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD. And if it was a world-ending event, how could the Thessalonians have possibly thought that they were already in the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:2)? This phrase is used several times in the Old Testament and applies to judgments that have occurred throughout history. One example is Isaiah 13, which describes the judgment of Babylon:

*Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,*

*To lay the land desolate;
And He will destroy its sinners from it.
For **the stars of heaven and their constellations**
Will not give their light;
The sun will be darkened in its going forth,
And the moon will not cause its light to shine.*
(Isa 13:9-10)

Another example is the judgment of Edom in Isaiah 34:

*All the host of **heaven shall be dissolved,**
And the **heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;**
All their host shall fall down
As the leaf falls from the vine,
And as fruit falling from a fig tree. (Isa 34:4)*

Both of these are describing past “days of the Lord,” so this language is not literal because the earth is still here; the stars have not literally fallen, and heaven has not literally rolled up as a scroll. This is Jewish apocalyptic literature describing the fall of earthly powers or governments. This is the same language used in the New Testament to describe the Day of the Lord / Second Coming of Christ (Matt 24:29; 2 Pet 3:10-12):

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the **sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven,** and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matt 24:29)*

So, when was this supposed to occur? According to Matthew 24:34, it was supposed to occur in “*this generation*” (the first-century generation to whom Jesus was speaking). When the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2, Peter said that was a sign of the soon coming Day of the Lord (Acts 2:16-21; see also Joel 2:28-32). Jesus also said that John the Baptist was Elijah who would be sent *before* the great day of the Lord (see also Mal 4:5-6):

*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until **John**. And if you are willing to receive it, **he is Elijah** who is to come. (Matt 11:13-14)*

*But I say to you that **Elijah** has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that **He spoke to them of John the Baptist**. (Matt 17:12-13)*

The writer of Hebrews stated that the day of the Lord was *approaching* (Heb 10:25). Pastors often use this verse to convince people of the importance of attending weekly church services. But that is not the context

here. The context is the day of the Lord and the gathering of Israel that would take place on that day. When Paul wrote “*not to forsake the assembling of ourselves,*” he was referring to a specific gathering that was soon to take place. The Greek word for “*assembling*” is the same Greek word in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 (*concerning the coming of the Lord and our **gathering** to Him*). The Old Testament frequently speaks of Israel being gathered in the last days. (See Jer 4:5-6; Isa 11:12, 49:5-7, 56:6-8; Ezek 39:17).

So, when did this day of the Lord gathering occur? It occurred in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The judgment spoken of in the New Testament was for Israel (the unbelievers who rejected Christ). In Matthew 24 Jesus said that the Jewish Temple would be destroyed (v.3) before that generation passed away (v.34). This happened 40 years later; the length of a biblical generation (Num 32:12; Heb 3:8-10).

So, how could it be a *gathering* of Israel if it was also a *judgment* of Israel? The **gathering** was of spiritual Israel, the true **believers** in Christ into His kingdom (Eph 2:11-3:6). The **judgment** was specifically for the **unbelieving** Jews. We need to remember that the day of the Lord is two-fold. Peter and Paul both spoke of this day as being a day of *judgment for unbelievers* and a day of *redemption for believers*. Paul said sudden destruction would come upon *unbelievers* (1 Thess 5:3), but that day would not overtake *believers* (v.5). Peter said it would be a day of judgment for ungodly men (2 Pet 3:7), and yet it was a day *believers* were looking forward to (v.12). How did the destruction of Jerusalem provide redemption for Christ followers? Because it ended the Old Covenant sacrificial system that Christ died to replace. And it ended the Jewish persecution of Christians and allowed Christianity to break free from Judaism.

On a final note, we would like to point out for our dispensational friends that Peter said he was looking for a New Heaven and New Earth (2 Peter 3:13), NOT A PRETRIB RAPTURE OR A MILLENNIAL KINGDOM. The new heaven and earth is symbolic of the new covenant in Christ. Peter said the new heaven and earth is where righteousness dwells. Righteousness is found in Christ (2 Cor 5:21), and Paul described the *new covenant* as a ministry of righteousness (2 Cor 3:9).

We realize that most of our audience is not dispensational, but perhaps we have provided some talking points for our preterist friends. For more information, check out our books: *The Return of Christ: Why are we still waiting?* and *End Times Explained: Understanding the Different Views*. Blessings! Pete and Rachael Wrue. ✝

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1. *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, 1 Corinthians through Revelation, Vol. 5, pp 400, 748, 749*
 2. *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary, pp 449, 492*
 3. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p 143; 2 Peter & Jude, p 121*