

# New Testament Essays

In Honor of  
Homer A. Kent, Jr.

Gary T. Meadors, Editor

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Edited by  
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## Editor's Preface

It is a rare event to honor a professor for forty years of faithful service to one institution. Such is the case with Dr. Homer A. Kent, Jr. With the end of the 1990-1991 academic year, Dr. Kent will retire as a full-time professor at Grace Theological Seminary. His service to Grace will continue with his teaching on a part-time basis, and for this the seminary is grateful.

You may read Ronald Clutter's biographical article to receive an overview of Dr. Kent's life and ministry, so I won't duplicate that material in this preface. Suffice it to say that Dr. Kent's ministry at Grace is virtually immeasurable. He exemplifies the image which we desire to promote at Grace Theological Seminary.

The bibliography which you will find at the end of the festschrift reveals that a major focus of Dr. Kent's ministry has been the education of lay people and pastors. His writings, particularly his commentaries on books of the New Testament, have been widely used in lay Bible study settings, as initial introductions in college courses on the respective books, and by pastors for sermon preparation. In recent years while attending professional meetings with Dr. Kent I have observed on numerous occasions that teachers and pastors from a wide variety of backgrounds have thanked him for his very usable Bible study helps. He often remarked to me afterwards that he himself had no idea that his writings had reached such a variety of people. It was obvious to me that hearing such news was a great encouragement to him.

The articles included in this volume are designed to minister to the diverse audience which Dr. Kent has served. Some articles will provide the new Christian with spiritual food from the Word. Others will challenge the more advanced student to grow in their exegetical and theological horizons. All are a statement of thanks to Homer Kent for his friendship and fidelity over these past forty years.

A few words of an editorial nature are appropriate before I close this preface. A number of decisions arise when working with articles

from a variety of sources. The close reader may note some diversity in form and style. As editor, I have endeavored to retain the idiosyncrasies of each author and, therefore, a certain level of diversity has been allowed. All abbreviations for primary sources and periodical literature in the notes may be accessed by reference to the format for the *Grace Theological Journal* found inside the front cover of the journal.

The quality of this production has been enhanced by a number of people in addition to the fine work by the authors. The very existence of this volume is due to the willingness of Mr. Charles Turner of BMH Books to take on a festschrift project. Most publishers refuse such projects because they are usually not profitable from a marketing standpoint. The skill of Ken Herman with the team at BMH Printing and the expert composition typing by Mrs. Barbara Manahan of Eisenbrauns have greatly contributed to this tribute to Dr. Kent. Last but certainly not least, a special word of thanks is due to my secretary, Mrs. Lana Seidel, for caring for a host of details during the process of putting this volume together.

Gary T. Meadors  
Easter 1991



# **The Apostle's Watchword: Day of the Lord<sup>1</sup>**

**Richard L. Mayhue**

The biblical phrase "Day of the Lord" (DOL) stands as a key term in understanding God's revelation about the future. 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. 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.

## INTRODUCTION

"Day of the Lord" embodies one of the major strands woven throughout the fabric of biblical prophecy. Without a clear understanding of DOL, the pattern of God's plan for the future would remain less than clear to us.

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

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whatever Peter and Paul understood about DOL. Beecher argued that

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.<sup>2</sup>

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. 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."<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup>

DOL prophecies found fulfillment in various ways. These included (1) the Assyrian deportment of Israel ca. 722 B.C. (Amos 5:18, 20), (2) the Assyrian invasion of Judah ca. 701 B.C. (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11), (3) the Babylonian exile of Judah ca. 605-586 B.C. (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 13:6; Zeph 1:7; Ezek 13:5), (4) the Babylonian defeat of Egypt ca. 568 B.C. (Ezek 30:3), (5) the demise of Edom ca. 845 B.C. (Obadiah 1-14), and (6) the eschatological judgments of the tribulation period (Obadiah 15; Joel 2:31; 3:14; Isa 2:12; 13:9; 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 be-



cause 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. 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."<sup>5</sup>

The prominent theme of every DOL prophecy is God's judgment of sin. 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; Isa 13:6; Zeph 1:7; and Ezek 30:3, near historical fulfillments are prominent. The far event is described as "near" in Obadiah 15; Joel 3:14; and Zeph 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 Zech 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 story which were indeed days of judgment both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup>

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. The 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.<sup>8</sup>

The DOL is a generic biblical phrase used by God's prophets to describe either the immediate future or the ultimate eschatological consummation.<sup>9</sup> 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 Joel 3:14, 18 and Zeph 3:8, 11, 16; cf. also Obadiah 15, 17; Zech 14:1, 9-11).<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> DOL is not bound to a definite time duration. It could last only for hours or it could continue for days. Only context can determine DOL longevity, and even then only general approximation can be made.

Now, with this Old Testament summary in mind, let us turn our attention to the New Testament.



Dr. Homer A. Kent, Jr., completed forty years of faithful service to Grace Theological Seminary and Grace College at the end of the 1990-1991 academic year. He has served as Professor of Greek and New Testament and Academic Dean in the Seminary as well as presiding as President of both the College and the Seminary during the years 1976-1986. Dr. Kent has had an active role in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches and is known by the larger evangelical community for his helpful publications on several books in the New Testament. His volumes on the book of Acts,

the Pastoral Epistles, and Hebrews, have been widely circulated.

The present volume is called a "festschrift". This means that it is a book of essays intended to honor the recipient for his life of service and contributions to the cause of Christ. These essays are written by individuals who have studied and taught with Dr. Kent over the years. Each author has expressed their appreciation for Homer Kent's life of ministry by the articles which appear in this volume.

Some of the biblical subjects treated in this book are:

- "Form and Function in the Letters of the New Testament"
- "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism"
- "The Background to the Good Shepherd Discourse in John 10"
- "Peter in the Gospel of Matthew"
- "The Christian Hope: A History of the Interpretation of the Millennium"
- "Ephesians 1:3-14: The Blessings of Salvation"

These articles along with seven others provide a wide range of helpful information for students of the Bible.

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