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THE DAY OF YAHWEH

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In the study of the Old Testament, the concept of the Day of Yahweh has long been considered to be central to the prophets and their view of the future. Ladislav Černý described it as a doctrine that "touches all the intellectual and emotional, the mythological and theological, the spiritual and ritual, the ideological as well as social elements of Hebrew religion."\(^1\) Furthermore, Černý said, "without this doctrine Hebrew religion would not be such, as it is now known to us."\(^2\)

When studying the Day of Yahweh the initial question addresses the nature of that day. The Biblical references are varied in their description, and they are all found within the prophetic writing and the book of Lamentations. Most scholarly attempts to clarify the nature of the Day of Yahweh have focused on the pre-prophetic origin of the concept. However, since there are no references to the term dated earlier than that of Amos 5:18-20, these studies have focused on the imagery and phraseology that surround the specific prophetic references. Because of this, many theories lack specific support, being no better than guesswork. In examining the concept of the Day of Yahweh and the theories that have been written about it, we must keep in view the way the prophetic mind worked and remain as true to the biblical text as possible. However, the prophets
brought to any idea or concept their own unique interpretations. Thus, to understand the Day of Yahweh, one must not only understand the prophetic view but also the form of the concept which the prophets inherited.

In attempting a study of the Day of Yahweh, there are several names and theories that continually occur in the literature. For this reason they have, in some sense, become "classics" in the field. They include men like Hugo Gressman, Sigmund Mowinckel, Ladislav Černý, and Gerhard Von Rad; each having approached the problem differently and added something to the field of study. In this paper I will review the work of these men plus some of the more recent theories that have been published. After that I will attempt an historical tracing of the term through the prophetic literature.

Before describing the contributions of the scholars mentioned above to the understanding of the Day of Yahweh concept, it would be useful to introduce a working definition of the term "Day of Yahweh" and to give some statistics. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible defines the Day of Yahweh as "one of the designations of the impending decisive intervention of God in the prophetic anticipation of the future." It suggests that the phrase developed out of the Hebrew practice of designating decisive historical events as "days." This is, of course, slightly oversimplified, but adequate.
In the Old Testament the world "day" appears 2285 times, and covers a wide range of meanings. "Day of Yahweh" appears only sixteen times, however, and three other times with slight variations. (Isaiah 13:6,9; Ezekiel 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:4,14 (twice); Malachi 3:25—Isaiah 2:12; Ezekiel 30:3; Zechariah 14:1.) There are other passages which could logically be connected with the concept of the day of Yahweh, but adding texts in this way can be dangerous and just create unnecessary confusion.

Theories of the Day of Yahweh
Hugo Gressman

One of the names consistently encountered in studying the Day of Yahweh is Hugo Gressman. Gressman relied heavily on his predecessor, Herman Gunkel, a fact which he readily admitted. Gressman's classic work, *Der Ursprung der isrealitische-jüdischen Eschatologie*, was published in 1905 and is best understood against the theological background of his time. His theories stem from his struggle to understand the fragmentary and diverse character of the judgement in pre-exilic prophets and the mythological nature of other early biblical writings, especially the natural phenomena that accompanied the theophanies of Yahweh.

There are two basic ideas on which the work of Gressman rests. First of all, Gressman concluded that there was an ancient cyclical understanding of world history that involved a set number of world periods, each one ending in a complete destruction of the world. Each destruction was followed by
a totally new creation. This idea, said Gressman, was based upon the discovery of the precession of the Spring point of the sun -- a discovery made by Babylonian Astronomers.\textsuperscript{12}

The second idea on which Gressman rested his theory came from his study of the literature of other Oriental religions. He found many parallels to the biblical portrayals of coming devastation in such physical phenomena as languages, storms, volcanos, fire, war, earthquakes, and pestilence.\textsuperscript{13} Because of the similarities that he found, he affirmed Gunkel's conclusion that there was a common stock of Oriental mythology that originated in Babylon.\textsuperscript{14}

Gressman asserted that this common pool of mythological/eschatological ideas invaded Israelite thought at two different times:\textsuperscript{15} (1) very early in the prophetic time period (he even speaks of a pre-historic eschatology\textsuperscript{16}), and (2) after the exile.

This early invasion of the common Oriental mythology was only fragmentary, and was two-fold in nature. There was an eschatology of doom (Unheilseschatologie) and and eschatology of salvation (Heilseschatologie),\textsuperscript{17} both of which were at one point closely bound together as a single unit of thought.\textsuperscript{18} Early on the eschatology of doom predominated, but during the post-exilic invasion the eschatology of salvation took its place. Therefore, Gressman concluded that eschatology did not emerge from prophecy but from an earlier time. From the
beginning, the mythology that Israel adopted was eschatological and came from outside of Israel.¹⁹

In working specifically with the concept of the Day of Yahweh, Gressman defined it as "a day in which Yahweh revealed himself in some way, on which he acted in some way, and which is characterized by him in some manner."²⁰ It was necessarily this general in order to include all the different descriptions of the Day of Yahweh found in the Bible. Gressman emphasized, however, that there were possibly many different days of Yahweh, but this definition of the Day of Yahweh connected solely with the future and had become eschatological even in pre-prophetic times.²¹

In the development of the concept, the writings of Amos are significant. From the mention of the Day of Yahweh in 5:18-20, it is possible to conclude that the Day of Yahweh was an already established term in popular thought. Amos added two significant factors, however. On the one hand, the Day of Yahweh was now directed at Israel/Judah. On the other hand, no longer was the Day a patriotic and nationalistic concept, but it was associated with the ethical and moral conduct of the people.²³ Amos added an ethical dimension to the Day of Yahweh.

The popular eschatology of doom persisted, though, into the prophetic period as can be seen in Zephaniah. Zephaniah was not a creative prophet and so his ideas approximately reflect the popular eschatology of the day, according to
Gressman. In Zephaniah we see the theme of total destruction of all the nations on the Day of Yahweh.

The second great intrusion of mythology came during the post-exilic period. During this period the eschatology of salvation began to dominate due to the belief that during the exile all previous prophecy of doom had been fulfilled; God had already brought His destruction upon Israel. Because of the influx of mythology, mythological imagery predominated, and both the universal nature of that day and the destruction of foreign nations was emphasized. From all this emerged the new apocalyptic level of eschatology.

Gressman has been generally criticized because of his presuppositions and methods of dealing with the material. Various questions have been raised as to the validity of the theory of world periods, the cyclical view of history, the common pool of Oriental mythology, and the theory of two penetrations. Also, Gressman has been criticized for overlooking the historical and social references of the prophet, and concentrating mainly on the descriptions of the natural phenomena that accompany the theophanies of Yahweh.

Sigmund Mowinckel

Sigmund Mowinckel was in some ways dependent upon Hugo Gressman and Herman Gunkel, but his theory was not as static as Gressman's and appeared to be more successful. Mowinckel's
theories were first stated in his books *Psalmenstudien*, I-IV which were published between 1921-1924. His theory was again stated in his book *He that Cometh* that was published in English in 1956.

Mowinckel differed significantly from Gressman in that he did not believe that there was always a developed eschatology in Israelite thought. As a matter of fact, Mowinckel did not believe that there was a developed eschatology until the late writings of the Old Testament, such as Daniel, and in later Judaism. Before the development of eschatology there was what Mowinckel called a "future hope." To better clarify the difference between these two terms, Mowinckel defined eschatology as:

>a doctrine or a complex of ideas about "the last things," which is more or less organically coherent and developed. Every eschatology includes in some form or other a dualistic conception of the course of history, and implies that the present world order will suddenly come to an end and be superseded by another of an essentially different kind.

In contrast to this, Mowinckel defined the future hope as being national and historical. "Any description of it must take account of the problem of its origin and its contents down through the ages." The concept of the Day of Yahweh was a part of the future hope of Yahwism.

Like Gressman, Mowinckel discovered that there was much in common between Babylon and Israel. However, for Mowinckel
the major similarities were in cultic activities. Gressman had noted the presence of an enthronement of Yahweh motif as a part of his eschatology of salvation. Mowinckel drew parallels between this motif and the akitu festival of the enthronement of Marduk at the Babylonian New Year. From this, he surmised the presence of an enthronement festival of Yahweh which was at the "center of cultic activities in Ancient Israel." Therefore, because of the enthronement motifs already connected with the Day of Yahweh, Mowinckel declared that "The day of Yahweh' originally meant the day of Yahweh's manifestation in the festal cult at the New Year Festival."

By piecing together information found in the Psalms and other books of the Old Testament, Mowinckel created a picture of this enthronement festival. It included a triumphal procession around the temple, recitation of the creation story, and the proclamation of Yahweh's renewed dominion over the world. During the festival the people experienced the coming of Yahweh which "guaranteed victory over enemies, deliverance from distress, and the realization of peace, good fortune, and favorable conditions."

Because Yahweh showed Himself to His people on the day of Yahweh during the New Year's festival, whenever things were going wrong and people were in distress, they began longing for a day of Yahweh that would bring a change of fortune. They longed for a day in which Yahweh would show himself
and destroy His enemies and, of course, those of Israel. This longing for an appearance of Yahweh to save and bless can be seen as the beginning of a separation of the Day of Yahweh from the cultic festival. However, this cannot yet be called a developed future hope.  

The idea of a future hope, latent in the covenant and the theophany of Yahweh at the enthronement festival, began to grow more defined in the prophetic era. The idea of a future hope also began to grow as the Day of Yahweh concept separated from the cultic festival. The process was aided initially by Amos who declared that, instead of a day of blessing, the Day of Yahweh would bring judgement on a punishment to Yahweh's people. Amos denounced the cultic feast, therefore connecting the Day of Yahweh with the denunciation of cultic activities. Throughout the prophetic era the future hope and eschatology were based on the conceptions in the enthronement festival which explains why ideas of creation and primordial time pervade eschatology -- the enthronement of Yahweh was a re-enactment of the events of primordial time.  

After Jerusalem fell in 587 B.C., prophetic thought turned from judgment to comfort and thoughts of restoration. Israel had been punished and now Yahweh was going to bless His chosen people. During this period the anonymous prophet Deutero-Isaiah wrote, and his work is central to the under-
standing of the Day of Yahweh and the future hope, according to Mowinckel. Deutero-Isaiah lifted the concept of restoration into a supra-terrestrial sphere and conceived of it as a "drama of cosmic dimensions." The ideas, however, were not original; Deutero-Isaiah worked from the developed system of ideas derived from the highly important New Year's festival where the enthronement of Yahweh was celebrated. During the exilic period certain themes were central: the new creation, the wonderful fruitfulness, the making of a new covenant, and the Kingdom of God. Mowinckel stated that "the whole picture of the future can therefore also be summed up in the expression, the day of Yahweh."

Even after the exiles returned from Babylon there was no part of their thought that can be formally called eschatology. Mowinckel believed that only under Persian influence did Israel develop a true eschatology with a dualistic world view. However, the tendencies were already evident in the earlier "Jewish future hope" where Yahweh's kingly rule would put an end to all injustice and abuse and His perfect will would be established.

The major problem with Mowinckel's theory was that it was based entirely on the cultic day of Yahweh and His enthronement. However, there is no mention of this day of enthronement found anywhere among the biblical descriptions of the various festivals of Ancient Israel. Also, like Gressman, Mowinckel tended to ignore certain aspects of
the references to the Day of Yahweh in order to concentrate on the cultic aspects. 45

Ladislav Černý

In 1948 Ladislav Černý published his book The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems which reviewed most of the major modern theories of the Day of Yahweh. Černý followed this with his own explanation of the concept. In writing this work, Černý relied upon the previous works of Gressman and Mowinckel. 46 His analysis is divided into five areas:

(1) The sources and content of the concept; (2) the original form of the Day of Yahweh; (3) the age and development of the eschatological doctrine of the Day of Yahweh; (4) the historical and social causes of the beginning of eschatology; and (5) the ethnological origin of the concept of the Day of Yahweh. 47

In searching for the source and content of the Day of Yahweh, Černý first of all saw the concept as coming from the psychology of the "collective mind" of the Hebrew nation and more specifically in the idea of the "corporate personality." This attitude helped explain the extension of the Day of Yahweh in time and space. It also linked the popular ideas with prophetic eschatology, and yet it also separated them widely. Finally, this attitude explained the deep connection between the past memories found in the Hebrew tradition and the later historical time when eschatology appeared. 48
Secondly, Černý emphasized that Yahweh played the principle role in the Day of Yahweh. Also, within the concept, Yahweh's personality was seen in a twofold sense: Yahweh as the furious, fearful, and zealous deity, and also as the righteous god. These characteristics were not confined solely to the Israelite god, but it was a part of the oldest strata of the native tradition and pointed backward even to the pre-historic nomadic past. 49

Thirdly, in his discussion of the source and content of the Day of Yahweh, Černý said that the material used in the actual descriptions of the Day of Yahweh were merely the accidents. They are secondary because they were neither original to eschatology nor to the Hebrews. This material, which Černý called "the technical inventory" of the descriptions of the Day of Yahweh, was originally non-eschatological and was a part of a general cultural pattern from which many nations derived their mythology. Each nation, however, gave it the mark of their own individuality. 50

In searching for the origin of the Day of Yahweh, Černý rejected the idea of a day of battle, a day world catastrophe, and also Mowinckel's suggestion of the cultic enthronement festival of Yahweh. For Černý, the Day of Yahweh was the day that Yahweh "determines or 'decrees' 'hard luck' or 'end' or even 'death' to somebody or something; it is the fate decreed by Yahweh." 51 This interpretation made it possible
to harmonize all the various descriptions of the Day of Yahweh, and also the many theophanies, days of battles, and days of plagues without resorting to any special festival or cultic day.52

In trying to determine the age and development of the Day of Yahweh concept, Černý gave the following scheme.53 There was a popular concept of the Day of Yahweh that was widely diffused before the time of Amos. At this time it was "a day of decreed fate when the future of the people would be newly shaped by Yahweh and their survival in present or coming trials finally secured."54 It was collectivistic, nationalistic, and catastrophic for the gentiles. After the Day, earthly history would continue with one exception; Yahweh's people would live in everlasting peace and prosperity.

This concept was changed by the prophets of the pre-exilic period, in particular, Amos. It retained its collectivistic character, but now the terrors of that day would be felt by the Israelites as well as the gentiles. The unrighteousness and unfaithfulness of Yahweh's people would bring punishment. Furthermore, the concept was expanded at the end of the pre-exilic era when its nationalistic emphasis gave way to a universalistic one.

During the exile a further change was made. At this point the doctrine of retribution changed from a collectivistic concept to an individual one. Under the influence of this
parallel concept the Day of Yahweh also became more individualistic.

The final step in the development of the Day of Yahweh came, according to Černý, when it became cosmic and eternal. The Day of Yahweh became enlarged to the cosmic extent whereby all the heavens and earth would be destroyed. It also became eternal in that it would make an end to all previous history, which would be replaced by a new world under the control of Yahweh.

The fourth question of Černý's analysis of the Day of Yahweh dealt with the historical and social causes of the beginning of eschatology. Černý wrote that there were only three components of historical reality [that] we may consider as the last, true and irreducible base upon which the doctrine of the Day of Yahweh, and with it the whole eschatology, are dependent indeed. These three components are:

1. The impact of the Hebrew nomadic clans with the city culture in Canaan, the change of their pastoral life into an agricultural one with the social re-organization and regrouping as a consequence of this change;

2. The exposed geographical position of the two Hebrew states thus created and the permanent danger to their independence;

3. The native ideology of the nation including her religion and her special conception of social relations.55

As the nomadic clans settled into the pastoral and agricultural life of Canaan, new social groups and classes were formed. Two things resulted from this: the accumulation of great wealth by some people and a deeper penetration of
foreign cults into Yahwism. The prophets, as the only protagonists of the old nomadic ideals of severe Yahwism, denounced the social unrighteousness and religious unfaithfulness of many. They did this through their grim expectation of the coming doom which is found in their usage of the Day of Yahweh concept. Through this Day corrupt social and religious orders, along with their leaders, would be overthrown. Of course, though the religious and social abuses were the reason for Yahweh's coming, the prophets saw external dangers as the agents of Yahweh's purpose. The prophets were aware of the power of Assyria and later of Babylon.57

Finally, the native ideology of the Israelites was centered in the national god, Yahweh. Yahweh was seen as a god who acted directly in the historical realm. By doing this, Yahweh would glorify himself and shape the fate of his people. The expectation of this coming Day reached its height about half a century before Amos. Amos was the first to change the concept, and he gave it its revolutionary content. From Amos, the later prophets developed a doctrine which eventually gave birth to all of eschatology.58

The final question Černý posed for himself was the ethno-logical origin of the Day of Yahweh concept. Amos changed the concept of the Day out of the knowledge that the existing world and the existing orders in it do not provide for the survival of the entire community, and therefore,
this world must give way to a new and better one. This idea of the necessity of change in the world "makes the conception of the Day of Yahweh unique among the Hebrews."\textsuperscript{58}

Černý's theories have been questioned because he, like Gressman and Mowinckel, put more emphasis on the prophetic origin of the term rather than on the term itself as it is found in the biblical text. Although Černý understood the need to keep in mind the historical settings which influenced the Day of Yahweh, he did not deal with them in his analysis. The method of using an origin theory to interpret later prophecy is questionable.\textsuperscript{59}

Gerhard Von Rad

In 1959 Gerhard Von Rad published an important article which has significantly contributed to the study of the Day of Yahweh. As the title implies, Von Rad's article, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," dealt with the origin question specifically.

By examining each reference to the phrase in the text, Von Rad concluded that the Day of Yahweh was a day of war. It was the day when Yahweh would rise against his enemies, fight in battle, and be victorious. Von Rad also stated that the imagery surrounding the concept was of old Israelite origin and was derived from the traditional Holy War concept in which Yahweh personally appeared to annihilate his enemies. The prophets adopted the imagery of this older tradition
when they used the Day of Yahweh concept. 60

Von Rad saw a consistent pattern in the prophetic references that suggest that it was taken from Holy War imagery. This pattern began with the call for Yahweh's army to assemble for battle, followed by sanctification of the army. There was always some kind of theophany experience, and Yahweh Himself would lead His people into battle. However, even before the battle began the enemy was filled with panic. During the battle there occurred horrible changes in the natural sphere, and the result of all this was total desolation. 61

Originally, the Day of Yahweh was seen by the prophets as the day that would bring the salvation of Yahweh. The Day would occur from time to time for the protection of Yahweh's people. With Amos we see that the Day of Yahweh could also be against the Israelites. Eventually the idea returned to its original meaning, a day of salvation for Israel. 62 The prophets used the concept of the Day of Yahweh whenever great political complications were seen on the horizon, especially in the case of approaching armies. 63 The more universalistic approach of the prophets is explained by Von Rad as having arisen from the greater amount of political tension found throughout the prophetic period. 64 Israel was located in an area that saw the tension of world historical commotions.

Von Rad believed that the Day of Yahweh concept did not
have to be eschatological. The concept could be eschatological if the Day of Yahweh was seen as going beyond the ancient scheme of salvation, or if the Day pointed beyond the already existent relationship between Israel and Yahweh. However, even in relatively late texts the Day could be interpreted uneschatologically.

Finally, in dealing with the age of the concept, Von Rad believed that, although Amos was the first to mention the day of Yahweh, the concept had already been developed by this time. According to Von Rad, a survey of the references to the Day of Yahweh would show their connection with the Holy War concept, thus pushing the age of the Day of Yahweh concept far back in time.

In this article, Von Rad seems to have focused in on the equation of the Day of Yahweh to a day of battle to the exclusion of any other possible interpretations which could be derived from the text. However, from the beginning Von Rad stated that he was dealing with the origin of the term which could, in later times, very easily have been stretched to encompass other ideas. Von Rad's ideas are possible, but like all origin theories there is nothing available to support or refute the theory. When reading Von Rad's theory it must be kept in mind that the origin of the Day of Yahweh can only furnish us with a basis for the imagery that the prophet employed for their own historical and theological purposes.
Frank Moore Cross, Patrick D. Miller, Jr. and Douglas Stuart

Gerhard Von Rad's suggestion that the origin of the Day of Yahweh can be found in the concept of the Holy War was a significant contribution to the field of study. Since his article was published in 1959 much work has been done to expand and correct Von Rad's work. I have selected three articles which seem to make significant contributions in this area. First of all, there is the article by Frank Moore Cross entitled "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," which suggests that Mowinckel's belief, associating the origin of the Day of Yahweh with the enthronement festival, is not incompatible with Von Rad's belief that the origin is to be found in the concept of the Holy War. Also, there is the article entitled "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War" by Patrick D. Miller, Jr., which suggests that the idea of a divine council is also a part of the Day of Yahweh concept. Finally, the article, "The Sovereign's Day of Conquest," by Douglas Stuart suggests that some features of the Day of Yahweh concept can be found in non-Israelite contexts.

Frank Moore Cross, in his article found in the book Biblical Motifs, stated that there are two major views of what was central to the early Israelite cults. One view holds that the central or constitutive element in the early cult was the dramatic re-enactment by recital and ritual
acts the events of the Exodus and conquest. This was the primary or initial movement in a covenant renewal ceremony where the community's common life and institutions were restored and renewed. The opposing view states that the central or constitutive movement in the early cults was a celebration of the enthronement of Yahweh as king and creator of the cosmos by virtue of his victory over His enemies in a cosmogonic struggle. Cross associated Von Rad with the former view and Mowinckel with the latter. However, for Cross their views were ideal types in the Weberian sense and neither was found in a pure state. Because of that, these views need not be as opposite as some have claimed.  

Cross believed that the Day of Yahweh concept as seen in the prophets was a combination of several elements. First of all, there was the element of the Holy War where Yahweh was victorious over His enemies. Also, there was the festival element that combined the processional of the ark which celebrated ritual conquest and the procession of the king of glory to the temple. 

The combination of these elements occurred during the transition between the cults of the league and the cults of the kingdom and helped make the transition possible. Eventually, the joining of these motifs precipitated the development of the apocalyptic ideology. When the monarchy became established the royal festivals dominated and the cultic institutions of the league decayed. However, "ritual
conquest" persisted in the royal cultus.72

Because several elements went into the imagery of the Day of Yahweh, it is not surprising that the text is ambiguous. The Day of Yahweh had several origins, each of which are found reflected in the texts. Cross argued, in a way that seems very true to the biblical text, that the Day of Yahweh is a concept that has incorporated in it several different elements.

The article by Patrick D. Miller, Jr., which is found in Vetus Testamentum, builds further on the base that Cross had laid down. Miller accepted Cross's theory that the Day of Yahweh imagery came from the tribal Holy War traditions as they were carried out through the royal cultus in the association of ritual conquest with an enthronement motif. Miller added another element to the background of the Day of Yahweh, that of a divine council.

In studying the Day of Yahweh, Miller found the imagery of a divine council which participated as a cosmic or heavenly army in the military activities that were associated with that Day. This cosmic army worked jointly with an human army; the two together would bring about Yahweh's will.73 The idea of the divine council tied in the Day of Yahweh concept with very early traditions; Yahweh is leading the battle, there is participation by divine forces commanded by Yahweh as their divine warrior-king.

Miller saw the idea of a divine council as being a link
between Holy War theology and heavenly army theology with prophetic eschatology and the Day of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{74}

Finally, Douglas Stuart's article, which was printed in the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, searched outside of Israel for the basis of some of the features which comprise the Day of Yahweh concept. This is in contrast with Von Rad who believed that every aspect of the concept was Israelite, and it is a further moderation of Von Rad's work. Stuart felt that the prophetic concept of the Day of Yahweh was influenced by various Sumerian, Hittite, Egyptian, and semitic texts from a wide variety of places and times. There was a tradition found in the Ancient Near East that was apparently widespread and which Stuart judged had an influence on the Day of Yahweh concept. The tradition dealt with a truly great king whose power and authority were so universal that he could complete a military campaign, or an entire war of conquest, against his enemies in a single day. This tradition links together the idea of a sovereign leader and the idea of battle in a \textit{single} day.\textsuperscript{75}

The idea suggested by Stuart, as well as those suggested by Cross and Miller, all expand and enrich the scholarship on the Day of Yahweh concept. They are all based on Von Rad's work, but collectively they have helped to show that the concept of the Day of Yahweh developed out of a wide variety of motifs. It would be difficult to prove, or even to accept the idea that a concept as ubiquitous as the Day of Yahweh
developed from one source and incorporated no others. The places where the Day of Yahweh is specifically mentioned are varied in their imagery, thus showing the various elements that went into its development. Many different origins can be found for the Day of Yahweh, and without further source material they can all be viewed on equal footing. It is difficult for us today, looking back thousands of years, to definitely decide the exact sources for this concept.

A. Joseph Everson

In his doctoral dissertation done at Union Seminary of Richmond, Virginia, A. Joseph Everson approached the study of the Day of Yahweh concept in a new way. Having reviewed most of the major theories on the subject, Everson began his study with the purpose of discovering the historical and theological purpose(s) for the use of the Day of Yahweh concept by the prophetic writers. By analyzing the employment of the concept by the prophets to describe various historical events, whether they be past, imminent, or future events, the concept is kept within its historical settings. We can thus study the concept in the context of the political realities and historical events which influenced the original formulation and subsequent usage.

Particular emphasis is placed on the Day of Yahweh as a
past historical event which Everson believed to be the beginning for the total understanding of the Day of Yahweh. The Day of Yahweh was not viewed in pre-exilic and exilic times as a singular, universal, or exclusively future event of world judgment. Instead, said Everson, it was a powerful concept which was available to the prophet in interpreting momentous historical events. It was used by the prophets as a literary device to proclaim Yahweh's judgment on a particular people or nation. Throughout his work, Everson accepts the thesis found in Von Rad's Theology of the Old Testament that

The correlation between the prophets and world history is the real key to understanding them correctly, for they placed the new historical acts of God which they saw around them in exactly the same category as the old basic events of the canonical history -- indeed, they gradually came to realize that this new historical action was to surpass and therefore, to a certain extent, supersede the old. They were in fact called forth by their conviction that Yahweh was bringing about a new era for his people.78

The prophets, in employing the term the Day of Yahweh, were given a certain latitude and freedom. They therefore used the term for their own purposes in fitting it to specific historical events. "Precisely because of this freedom and latitude, the primary meaning of a particular Day of Yahweh announcement is to be discovered in connection with the religious and political situation contemporary with the original composition of an announcement."79 Despite the
freedom, though, there can be drawn some basic conclusions about the character of the Day of Yahweh. Everson divides them under eight headings.

1. The Day of Yahweh is a theological concept employed by the prophets as a literary device to designate various momentous historical events of the past, future, and imminent time. The events thus designated are days of Yahweh.80

Everson believed that it was incorrect to view the Day of Yahweh as either one great, final event of history or as an exclusively future event. The Day of Yahweh can refer to past events, and when announcements of future events were given it was specific historical events which were anticipated.

2. Where descriptive imagery is sufficiently present to indicate the character of the historical event, the Day of Yahweh concept consistently designates events of war. These events of war are sacral in character because of the presence and participation of Yahweh, who is triumphant in battle.81

Although the imagery is militaristic, that was not the primary purpose of the Day of Yahweh announcements. Their purpose was to declare the essential meanings of the events to which they referred. Everson also declared that the mention of natural calamities in certain portrayals of the Day does not conflict with the dominant portrayal of military conflict. Yahweh could use any or all forces of the natural world as elements and manifestations of his army.
3. In the Day of Yahweh texts, Yahweh is presupposed as the sovereign Lord or ruler over all nations of the world, who judges and punishes the nations for their arrogance and misconduct. Wherever and as long as arrogance and misconduct were present in the world, the concept could be re-appropriated to declare the inevitable consequence of such conduct by designating events or times when Yahweh's judgment and punishment would again be manifest in the world.82

Whereas there were some texts in which the Day of Yahweh was spoken of in terms of Yahweh and Israel alone, they do not contradict or negate the universal perspective found in most of the texts. Punishment was a major part of that Day both for Israel and other nations. When punishment was announced for a foreign nation or nations the presence of an acknowledged international norm or standard of conduct was indicated. This norm was upheld and sustained by Yahweh, and it was a reflection of Yahweh's will for mankind. Violation of this standard created guilt and brought punishment.

4. The announcements of the Day of Yahweh events indicate that the prophetic writers felt a sense of literary freedom as they appropriated the concept and at the same time were controlled or guided by an awareness of Yahweh's activity in fulfilling earlier prophecy.83

The freedom which the prophets were given has already been noted, and it can be seen in the various designations given the Day of Yahweh, the variety of imagery united with the concept, the literary forms in which the concept was incorporated, and the ways in which the concept was appropriated and re-oriented to fit different historical situations. Although it is not possible to ascertain a clear development
of the concept over time, there are differences between the earlier and later references. As time went on there was some sense of the fulfillment of prophecy in the long succession of events of military destruction which were understood as days of Yahweh.

5. The most prominent literary characteristics of the Day of Yahweh are the themes of dramatic contrast and dramatic reversal. These themes set forth and seek to correct the misunderstandings which were repeatedly associated with the Day of Yahweh events.84

The themes of dramatic contrast, where the past glories and future sorrows surrounding the Day of Yahweh were presented, and dramatic reversal, where Yahweh did the opposite of what was expected of Him, were both found in the texts relating to the Day of Yahweh, according to Everson. They were used by the prophets in order to correct the misunderstandings and the false contentions about that Day and thereby they provoked new reflection about faith in Yahweh.

6. The locution "day of Yahweh's vindication" expresses the polarity of thought associated with certain of the events described in the announcements. Of all the locutions, this designation conveys most clearly the full theological meaning of the concept of the Day of Yahweh.84

For Everson, there was a certain duality or polarity implicit in the term "the day of Yahweh's vindication." For those who were obedient and faithful to Yahweh, Yahweh's vindication meant rescue and protection. For those who were not faithful, vindication meant punishment and suffering. Also, especially during the period at the end of the exile, Israel's
restoration was directly dependent upon events of ruin for other nations. This dual activity of Yahweh's vindication provides the key for the understanding of dramatic contrast and dramatic reversal as described in the previous conclusion. Also, this duality of punishing arrogance and misconduct but rescuing and protecting those found faithful, which is clearly seen in the locution "the day of Yahweh's vindication," most clearly conveys the theological meaning of the Day of Yahweh concept.

7. The announcements of a universal Day of Yahweh coming upon all nations are not intended as detailed descriptions of a future cataclysmic event at the end of history, but are primarily declarations about the certainty of Yahweh's intent to judge and punish all guilty nations. There are indications that the universal Day of Yahweh frequently designated not a cataclysmic event but rather a future era which would involve the successive military destruction of one nation after another.86

Only in the late post-exilic prophecy was the idea of a cataclysmic destruction of many nations at one time presented. In earlier portrayals universal destruction was only the background or context for the announcement of the destruction of a single nation. Furthermore, the variety of portrayals and descriptions of the Day of Yahweh indicate that the prophets themselves were unsure of the precise manner in which their words would be fulfilled. Always, however, there is the surety that arrogance and misconduct would be punished among all nations of the world.

8. The future and imminent Day of Yahweh announcements are eschatological in that they "expel Israel from the safety of the old saving actions" and "shift the basis of salvation to a future action of God."87
For Everson, the correlation between the Day of Yahweh and its historical surroundings was evident. Whether or not a statement was eschatological was primarily a matter of definition. In classical prophecy there was no clear understanding of "the end of time" or "the last things." However, the future and imminent portrayals of the Day referred to events which brought the present order to an end. Everson thus reaffirmed his original thesis taken from Von Rad which stated that,

they gradually came to realize that this new historical action was to surpass and therefore, to a certain extent, supersede, the old. They were in fact called forth by their conviction that Yahweh was bringing about a new era for his people. 88

The approach Everson took was different but no less valid than any of the previous studies of the Day of Yahweh. As an historical and theological study it accomplished its goal. Of course, the controversy is, exactly what is the best point of departure for understanding the concept? In this century the search for the origin of the concept has dominated. Everson, however, differed from this approach, and with it he brought new insight.

Because he dealt with the material as it is found in completed form the narrowness of approach brought by the origin studies must be abandoned. With the greater inclusiveness that this allowed, a better understanding of the message of the prophets can be attained. Everson remained truer to the historical nature of the prophets.
However, this is not to say that origin studies are not useful. They must be the starting place for studies like that of Everson's.

**Textual References to the Day of Yahweh**

Although the study of various theories is useful, it may also be useful to spend some time actually studying various passages in which the phrase Day of Yahweh can be found. There are many approaches to how this can be done. Time and space do not allow for the study of all sixteen references plus all the variations which are related which would be the most complete and accurate approach. Because of that I have limited my study to four passages: Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:7-18; Ezekiel 13:1-5; and Obadiah. Through this selection of passages, I will cover the first mention of the phrase found in the Bible as well as a pre-exilic, exilic, and post exilic reference. Although this will not be a complete picture of the phrase in Old Testament thought, it is intended to be a fair representation.

**Amos 5:18-20**

As earlier indicated, Amos 5:18-20 is the earliest mention of the Day of Yahweh found in the biblical text. It is thus considered by many to be the proper point of departure for any study of the Day of Yahweh.

The prophet Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah
who was commissioned by Yahweh to prophesy to His people in Israel. The approximate date of Amos' ministry is 750 B.C.

In the book of Amos there is a heavy emphasis on social justice. There was a wide gap between the rich and the poor, and the rich were using the poor for their personal gain. Amos also calls for a return to the true worship of Yahweh that the people may live. However, Amos gives the impression that it is too late for Israel to save herself.

When speaking of the message of Amos, Hughell Fosbroke in the Interpreter's Bible says that of "the three elements of which the book is composed -- visions, oracles, narrative -- all agree in placing the prediction of imminent ruin at the heart of Amos' ministry."89 As can be perceived in the text, Amos introduced the idea of imminent ruin into the concept of the Day of Yahweh. It can be assumed that there was some kind of popular conception of a day of Yahweh since Amos gives no explanation of the term. Whatever that popular notion was, though, Amos was trying to correct it. The people longed for the Day because they believed that it would be a day of light and blessing. However, Amos was certain that, because Israel had turned away from Yahweh, His day would be against Israel and not against her enemies.

James Mays suggested that Amos was probably directing his speech to the crowds assembled at Bethel for the annual autumn festival which was called "the day of the festival of
The religious fervor of the crowd was probably at a fever pitch. Into this atmosphere Amos interjected the statement "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!" found in verse 18. This sentence carries with it the sense of a funeral lament. Israel's doom was already sealed, but she did not know it yet. This type of woe-cry pronounced over the living is found only in the prophetic writings. The word "woe" is not only a word of lamentation; it also carries with it the connotation of "mistaken" or "foolish." The people of Israel longed for the Day of Yahweh, but it would be a day of darkness rather than the expected day of light. It has been suggested that the people already understood the Day as being one of darkness, but never for them. By darkness Amos was probably referring to a state of misery or affliction as opposed to a state of well-being or light.

In verse 19, Amos was probably using a proverbial saying with metaphors drawn from country life. Through this imagery Amos was saying that there is no escape. The people longed for the Day of Yahweh, but in that escape they would only be faced with ruin. Finally, in verse 20 Amos reiterates what he said in verse 18, but he adds the words "gloom" and "brightness." These words were used particularly in descriptions of Yahweh.

Von Rad, in his work on the Day of Yahweh, did not use
this passage from Amos. For him, it was not as unequivocal as many people would like to think.\textsuperscript{95} According to Von Rad, Amos mentioned the Day only casually, and he did not intend to speak extensively on its meaning. Amos chose only one detail from a rich tradition, and he could just as easily have chosen another detail. If he had, of course, the entire emphasis of the passage would have been changed.\textsuperscript{96}

On the other hand, Mowinckel used this passage in support of his theory that the Day of Yahweh arose out of a New Year's festival. In verse 21 and following, Amos spoke against and rejected the rituals and worship of Israel. The fact that the tirade against the festivals followed immediately after a discussion of the Day of Yahweh suggested to Mowinckel that there was some connection in Amos' mind. However, there is some doubt as to whether verses 18-20 were originally connected with verses 21-27.\textsuperscript{97}

In dealing with the historical and theological purposes of the Day of Yahweh concept in Amos, Everson classified it as looking toward a future event. Amos wanted to contradict the popular belief that it would be a day of blessing for Israel. Israel was under covenant with Yahweh, but this did not exclude her from punishment for her apostasy. As Everson said, "the prophet boldly shifts the basis of faith in Yahweh away from the certainty of past sacral traditions and focuses upon an event in the future, wherein Yahweh will be known and all human conduct in Israel judged."\textsuperscript{98}
Zephaniah 1:7-18

Zephaniah, another pre-exilic prophet, also dealt with the Day of Yahweh, and he is often called the prophet of the Day of the Lord. The authenticity of much of the book of Zephaniah has been questioned, but chapter one is generally accepted as being authentic. It is this part of the book which later became the text for the great medieval Latin hymn "Dies Irae."

Zephaniah prophesied in Jerusalem around the time of King Josiah's reformation in 621 B.C. Many of the problems dealt with in the book were those prevalent during the decade prior to the reformation. II Kings 21-23 reports the problems as being: foreign customs, worship of astral bodies, syncretism, apostasy, and practical skepticism. Because of this similarity, the ministry of Zephaniah is most often dated before the reformation in 625 B.C.

Exactly who Zephaniah was is unclear. Although he may have connected with the cult in some way, there is no information to either confirm or deny this. Because of the title to the book given in verse 1, there has been speculation that Zephaniah was of royal lineage -- a direct descendant of King Hezekiah. It is unusual that the genealogy is carried back four generations since three was the usual. This perhaps indicates that there was something special about the fourth name mentioned.
"Zephaniah was no great creative prophet, and he found his ideas and images in the cult and previous prophets."\textsuperscript{100} It is generally believed that Zephaniah was well-versed in the writings of the prophets who came before him. "When we turn to Zephaniah and his view of the Day of Yahweh it can easily be seen that he is dependent upon previous prophets, first and foremost on Amos."\textsuperscript{101} In both prophets the Day of Yahweh concept declared Yahweh's judgement to the people. They also challenged popular views as to the nature of that judgment. Both felt that Israel had fallen into sin to such a great extent that total destruction was necessary as a punishment. However, both also offered a gleam of hope for a future after the destruction.\textsuperscript{102} Also, in Zephaniah's description of that day as being dark, we find a direct allusion to the threats of Amos which by that time were well known in Judah.\textsuperscript{103} However, in his writings on the Day of Yahweh, Zephaniah was portraying a much more universal picture of that day and the destruction that it would bring.\textsuperscript{104}

Zephaniah 1:7-18 contains a poem, written in the third person, about the Day of Yahweh. The Day was imminent, but the text has been tampered with in order to project the Day into the future. "On that day" and "at that time" have been added to the text in verses 8a, 9a, 10a, and 12a so that the Day would not seem so close at hand.\textsuperscript{105} Also, the authenticity of verse 18 is questioned, some saying that it was not part of the original writing, others saying that it should
be placed after verse 12 or 13.

Verse 7 is an introduction and it contains a command to be silent before Yahweh because His day is close at hand. The word sacrifice referred to a slaughter and probably meant a feast. Judah was to be the victim of Yahweh's sacrifice, and her enemies were being called as guests. The imagery used here was that of the Holy War. In this section, the Day of Yahweh affected Judah only.

The day of the Lord's sacrifice mentioned in verse 8 has been interpreted as meaning the great festival day which took place in Jerusalem. However, as has already been mentioned, the authenticity of verse 8a has been questioned. Verses 8 and 9 deal with some of the offenses that had been committed in Judah. Wearing foreign attire was an offense because it signified political and religious disloyalty. Leaping over the threshold was a Philistine practice and can best be explained by the passage found in I Samuel 5:5. The final abuses were violence and fraud which took place in their master's house. This probably referred to the palace where corruption always abounded.

Most of the places mentioned in verses 10 and 11 were located in the northern section of Jerusalem. Many of the sections were vulnerable and, assuming that Zephaniah was speaking of some kind of military attack, would be very hard hit if an attack were made.
There was no escaping that Day because Yahweh was going to search Jerusalem with a lamp. Verse 12 goes on to say that those who were stagnant in spirit and did not believe that Yahweh worked in the world would be punished. Verse 13 does not fit well after verse 12 where the day was approaching so quickly that there would be no time to build houses and plant vineyards.108

The great classical description of the Day of Yahweh is contained in verses 14-16. It returned to the idea of verse 7 that the Day was very near. The Day was to be a day of battle and great distress. It would be a day of thick clouds and darkness in a place where the sun almost always shone. It is a gripping description of the horrors that day would bring expressed in militaristic terms.

Yahweh speaks at the beginning of verse 17, but the sentence quickly switches back to the third person. The judgment spoken of here was against all men, and the clause "because they have sinned against the Lord" is generally considered to be a gloss in explanation of verse 17a. Whether verse 18 is speaking of bribery or gold and silver idols, the people's destruction would not be averted by these things. And, according to the last part of verse 18 which is of questionable authenticity, the destruction was to be complete.

Zephaniah has given us a rich picture of the Day of Yahweh, and it is invaluable source material. For Zephaniah,
the Day was near at hand. We do not know, however, exactly what the prophet had in mind when he wrote this poem. The imagery is definitely militaristic, and Zephaniah lived in a period of political turmoil where power was being shifted from one country to another. Perhaps he expected some kind of military invasion.

The Day was near at hand because of the apostasy of Judah. Although the passage was set in the context of universal destruction, it was Judah that was specifically being punished. It would be a fearful time of destruction; but, reading on, Zephaniah has left the impression that the punishment was not inevitable. Some might escape. Therefore, even in this terrible picture of desolation, there was some hope offered.

**Ezekiel 13:1-5**

Ezekiel prophesied during a very tumultuous time in the history of Judah. As a priest and then a prophet he lived through the decisive events of the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of his people. The book of Ezekiel is considered a watershed in biblical literature because it reflected major transitions in religious thought. It maintained a firm connection with previous tradition while exhibiting a marked originality. Because of this it stands in the middle between traditional prophets and the newer apocalyptic thought. The originality of Ezekiel arose from
the unique historical situation in which he found himself. Judah had fallen, and Yahweh's chosen people had gone into exile.

Ezekiel's active ministry lasted for approximately twenty-four years. Whoever edited the book of Ezekiel placed his oracles in chronological order. Most scholars place Ezekiel in the period between 592/593-573/567. The location of Ezekiel during this period is uncertain. Some place him either in Palestine or in Babylonia exclusively, while others place him in both places at different times. The authorship of the book is also uncertain. Whether it was written by one or many men, it has been heavily edited and in its present form displays a marked homogeneity.

The prophetic message of Ezekiel was deeply influenced by his priestly theology in connection with his prophetic visions. This influence is seen both in Ezekiel's concern for sacral law and in the undercurrents of legalism in the text. Also, in Ezekiel we find the theme of the glory and faithfulness of Yahweh in opposition to the apostasy of Israel. Punishment was deserved and unavoidable, and judgment was to be against individuals because ultimately they were responsible before Yahweh.

After the fall of Jerusalem, in the second half of the book a change in thought is evident. The judgement that had been declared by all the previous prophets had now taken
place; Israel had been punished. Now Israel's redemption was being worked out.\textsuperscript{113} 

Chapter thirteen of the book of Ezekiel is composed of oracles against false prophets and prophetesses. The chapter is a composite, and it shows the mark of the editor's hand. Prophesying from one's own imagination was considered a particularly terrible sin because the prophet was supposed to be a medium of God's word. In verse 4 Ezekiel called these false prophets "your prophets" because they were prophets of men and not of God.

In the context of this oracle against false prophets the phrase "Day of Yahweh" occurs. The meaning of verse 5 as a whole is easily seen. The false prophets did not help prepare the people for a crisis. Because they spoke falsely or remained silent, Israel did not hear the true word of Yahweh. Therefore, when they were most needed by the people, the prophets failed.

The question is, however, what exactly did Ezekiel mean in this reference to the Day of Yahweh? Herbert May in The Interpreter's Bible said that the "battle in the Day of the Lord" referred to the coming day of destruction predicted by Ezekiel and earlier prophets.\textsuperscript{114} However, there is some evidence that Ezekiel was referring to a past historical event as opposed to a future event.

Everson, in his doctoral dissertation, offered four alternatives for understanding this verse: (1) That it
was a pre-exilic reference to an earlier historical event; (2) that it was a pre-exilic reference to a future or imminent event; (3) that it was an exilic reference to past destruction; or (4) that it was an exilic or later reference to a future event. Everson rejected the first alternative because he saw Ezekiel's main concern being with the face of Jerusalem and the exile. He also rejected the fourth alternative for two reasons. There is no reason to deny the authorship of this verse to Ezekiel, and Ezekiel's main concern, as has been said, was with the events that occurred at the fall of Judah, not with any future events.\textsuperscript{115}

Everson believed that there was evidence to support both the second and third alternative, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There were many references in the book of Ezekiel that dealt with imminent destruction. Since Ezekiel prophesied before and during the siege that began in 588 B.C. and was familiar with the military movements in and around Jerusalem, it would be natural for him to speak of coming destruction. It was also a part of Ezekiel's writing style to cite past evils in direct connection with announcements of impending disaster.\textsuperscript{116}

However, there is some evidence that the third alternative is also correct. It is believed that Ezekiel looked back upon the events of destruction in Jerusalem from the exilic era and that he interpreted these events using the terminology and imagery of the Day of Yahweh concept. The
phrase "the breach in the wall" could be a direct historical reference to the breach made by Nebuchadrezzar's troops.\textsuperscript{117}

Everson has suggested that the prophecy in verse 5 originated prior to the events of 587 B.C. as a warning or announcement of approaching disaster. However, after 587 B.C., the oracle was used in retrospect to criticize the activities of the false prophets who had remained silent or prophesied pacifying words of hope which had brought terrible consequences. Thus, in this passage, the Day of Yahweh referred to the same event seen from different perspectives.\textsuperscript{118}

The Day is described in military terms and is political and international in character. Again, the event is one of punishment which could have been avoided if the prophets had spoken the word of Yahweh. However, they did not and Israel was punished.\textsuperscript{119} This passage is an interesting and unusual reference to the Day of Yahweh.

\textbf{Obadiah 1-21}

The book of Obadiah, although short, is of great importance to the study of the Day of Yahweh. Besides the fact that the book is accredited to Obadiah, which means "servant of Yahweh," nothing is known of the author. The book is the product of one author, except for verses 1-9 which were adopted from a pre-exilic oracle. Although the book has been given a wide variety of datings, the literary and historical evidence points to the mid-fifth century
as the most likely period for the prophecy in its present form.120

The occasion for the writing of the book seems to have been the expulsion of the Edomites from the land of Edom. Obadiah viewed this as divine judgement for the cruelty the Edomites had shown Israel. The book deals mainly with God's moral judgement of nations through history. Obadiah was saying that ultimately all the nations would be judged in the Day of Yahweh. However, a major part of Obadiah's messages is the hope for the Kingdom of God and victory for the remnant.121

The oracle was related as a divine speech, and the messenger formula is used throughout. The book falls into two main divisions: the judgement of Edom and the Day of Yahweh. Verse 15, which contains the only specific reference to the Day of Yahweh, divides the book in half.

Verses 1-9 contain the specific announcement of Edom's fall. Edom's arrogance and pride were likened to their own mountainous terrain where they "live in the clefts of the rock" and "build high like the eagle." But, because of their pride, they would be brought low. This would be accomplished by the military invasion of other nations. The destruction of Edom was to be total. Even "robbers by night" would leave more than those who were to destroy Edom.
The reason for the punishment of Edom was given in verses 10-14. These verses refer to a past event in which violence had been done in Israel, but Edom had stood aside watching. Instead of coming to the rescue of Israel, as would a brother, they rejoiced over Israel's misfortune. This was probably referring to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., the events of which created a strong enmity between the two countries.

In verse 15 the imminent approach of the Day of Yahweh included all the nations. The Day of Yahweh was to bring universal destruction. The second half of verse 15 dealt specifically with Edom. Edom had sinned and consequently it would be punished just as Judah had been punished. The imagery of drinking in verse 16 is found in other prophetic writings, and it is a metaphor for the wrath of Yahweh. Judah has already drunk from that cup, but now it was Edom's turn and after Edom all the other nations in succession. There would be a remnant that survived among the Israelites, however, and they would inhabit all the area as far south as the land of the Edomites.

The Day of Yahweh as portrayed in Obadiah was specifically against Edom. It was set against a larger background, however. All the nations were to drink the cup and "become as if they had never existed." The Day of Yahweh was a day of punishment for Edom and was military in character. There would be a remnant that survived, according to Obadiah, and
in this way he offered a ray of hope in his description of
destruction.

Conclusion

The concept of the Day of Yahweh is not an easy one
to comprehend, but it is of central importance to the
understanding of the prophets. Although it is only directly
mentioned fourteen times in the prophetic writings, the con­
cept pervades their words. The prophets were God's mouthpiece
to speak out His call for a return to faithfulness in Him.
Unfortunately, the Israelites did not heed the prophet's call
to turn from sin back to Yahweh. Because of this, the call
to repentance turned into an announcement of impending punish­
ment. Yahweh had judged His chosen people, and on that day,
the Day of Yahweh, the righteous God would bring about His
punishment. Therefore, the Day of Yahweh was first and fore­
most a day of punishment for the Israelites and for the
entire world.

The prophets were men of their times. They were neither
soothsayers nor fortune tellers, but they were men of God
who were sensitive and aware of their surroundings. They
dealt with historical situations, and they spoke the word
of God in their own unique way. In the 20th century,
however, we have difficulty understanding the prophets, because
the words "prophet" and "prophecy" tend to connote predicting
the future in some supernatural way. We are sensationalists
at heart, and viewing the prophets in their proper perspective takes away the mystery of prediction. We also look at our world dualistically. Living in a Christian nation, we are indoctrinated in the idea of two worlds: Someday this world will come to an end and be replaced by another: this outlook blurs our vision. When dealing with a concept like the Day of Yahweh, which lends itself so easily to a dualistic world view, we tend to forget the mind set of the prophet. The Day of Yahweh, to the prophet, was nothing more than a tool to illustrate the judgment and punishment of this world by Yahweh.

Because the prophets were men of their times, they dealt with their own historical situations and settings. When they spoke of coming destruction it was most likely that there was some invading army on the horizon. All their words were based in the historical events taking place around them. This was also true of the Day of Yahweh concept. Most likely the prophets saw something in the world that surrounded them that they thought would trigger a day of Yahweh, whether that be an invading army or a plague of locusts. Furthermore, in many instances, when the Day had passed the world would go on. Destruction of the apostate was the theme, not the destruction of our historical world.

In using the concept of the Day of Yahweh, the prophets had a large pool of imagery from which to draw. The two major images found were that of a theophany experience and
that of a military invasion. Changes in the natural world were associated with the Day and are connected to both images in the Israelite mind. In prophetic thought the Day was generally seen as being universal, although at times it was set in the context of the punishment of a particular nation. Of course, because it was a day of punishment, the descriptions of that day are fairly grim. Doom prevails, although some passages offered hope for a time after the Day of Yahweh had taken place. Ultimately, the final message is that Yahweh had control over everything — Israel, other nations, and the natural world.

The origin of the Day of Yahweh is a question that will never be answered definitely. The source material is not available. However, some theories can be seen as making more sense than others. Von Rad, in stating that the Day of Yahweh derived its origin from the Holy War imagery, pointed to an important aspect of the Day of Yahweh concept.

However, I do not consider this conclusion sufficient. Many ideas came together to form the concept of the Day of Yahweh as we see it in the prophetic writings, and limiting it to one source is perhaps going too far with the evidence that we have. There were probably many different days of Yahweh. Just as days of Holy War were called the Day of Yahweh, so were festival days. In both cases Yahweh was coming among his people. Also, we cannot limit the origin of the concept to completely Israelite origins. It would
be impossible to say for sure that the concept was influenced by other Near Eastern ideas. On the other hand, it would be impossible to rule out that possibility altogether.

The Day of Yahweh is a fascinating and complex phrase found in the Hebrew scriptures. Its exact meaning and significance are difficult to determine, but it is an important concept and thus deserves to be studied in depth. The analysis given here is only a beginning point for defining the problem and clarifying possible solutions. Intensive investigative research would be necessary to garner a complete understanding of the Day of Yahweh concept.
Endnotes


2 Černý, p. vii.


4 Černý, p. 5.


6 Černý, pp. 35, 38.


8 Everson, "The Day of Yahweh as Historical Event," p. 3.

9 Černý, p. 39.


11 Černý, pp. 37-38.

12 Černý, p. 38.


15 Černý, p. 36.

16 Černý, p. 38.

17 Everson, "The Day of Yahweh as Historical Event," p. 5.
18 Černý, p. 36.
20 Černý, p. 37.
21 Černý, p. 37.
26 Černý, p. 39.
27 Černý, p. 41.
29 Mowinckel, p. 125.
30 Mowinckel, p. 125.
33 Mowinckel, p. 132.
35 Mowinckel, p. 132.
36 Mowinckel, pp. 132-133.
38 Mowinckel, p. 143.
40 Mowinckel, pp. 138-139.
41 Mowinckel, p. 139.
42 Mowinckel, pp. 144-145.
43 Mowinckel, pp. 264-265.
47 Černý, p. 53.
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