

Zephaniah 1:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

Analysis

This verse introduces one of Scripture's most solemn themes: the Day of the LORD. "The great day of the LORD is near" (qarov yom-Yahweh ha-gadol) announces imminent divine intervention in judgment. The phrase "Day of the LORD" (yom Yahweh) appears throughout prophetic literature (Isaiah 13:6-9; Ezekiel 30:2-3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15; Malachi 4:5) describing God's decisive act of judgment against sin and vindication of righteousness.

"It is near, and hasteth greatly" (qarov u-maher me'od) emphasizes urgent immediacy. The verb maher means to hurry, hasten, or approach rapidly—this isn't distant prophecy but imminent crisis. "The voice of the day of the LORD" (qol yom Yahweh) personifies the day itself as crying out. "The mighty man shall cry there bitterly" indicates even warriors—the strong, brave, and powerful—will wail in terror when God's judgment strikes. No human strength, military power, or strategic defense can resist divine judgment.

The following verses elaborate this terror: "That day is a day of wrath...trouble and distress...wasteness and desolation...darkness and gloominess...clouds and thick darkness" (1:15). The vocabulary accumulates synonyms for catastrophe, creating overwhelming impression of total devastation. The Day of the LORD brings not gradual decline but sudden, comprehensive judgment—the ultimate expression of

God's holy wrath against persistent, unrepented sin. This theme climaxes eschatologically in final judgment (2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6:12-17, 16:14).

Historical Context

For Zephaniah's audience, the immediate "Day of the LORD" was Babylon's invasion and Jerusalem's destruction (586 BC). Nebuchadnezzar's armies besieged Jerusalem, breached its walls, burned the temple, slaughtered inhabitants, and exiled survivors (2 Kings 25). This fulfilled covenant curses from Deuteronomy 28:47-57 and Leviticus 26:27-39. The devastation was so complete that Lamentations describes mothers eating their children during the siege (Lamentations 4:10)—horrific fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:53-57.

However, the Day of the LORD has multiple historical fulfillments and ultimate eschatological consummation. Partial fulfillments include: Assyria's conquest of Israel (722 BC), Babylon's destruction of Judah (586 BC), Jerusalem's devastation by Rome (AD 70), and various judgments throughout history. But these are foretastes of the final Day when Christ returns to judge the living and dead (Acts 17:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 19:11-21, 20:11-15).

Zephaniah's description influenced later biblical imagery. The cry of mighty men appears in Revelation 6:15-17 when "kings of the earth, great men, rich men, chief captains, and mighty men" hide in caves begging rocks to fall on them. The language of darkness, clouds, and thick darkness echoes Joel 2:2, 31 and Jesus's description of cosmic disturbances at His return (Matthew 24:29). The Day of the LORD thus bridges all of Scripture as the theme of God's ultimate, decisive, inescapable judgment against all unrighteousness.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How should the certainty and urgency of the Day of the LORD affect Christian living, witness, and priorities?
2. What does the terror of even "mighty men" on that day teach about human inability to resist or escape God's judgment?
3. How does understanding the Day of the LORD as both historical and eschatological shape interpretation of prophetic Scripture?

Interlinear Text

מָאֵד	וַיָּמָהּ	רָ	קָרֹב	וְהַגָּדֹל	יְהוָה	יּוֹם	קָרֹב	וְ
greatly	and	hasteth	is near	The great	of the LORD	day	is near	
H3966	H4118		H7138	H1419	H3068	H3117	H7138	
גִּבּוֹר:	שָׁם	צָרָה	יָמָר	יְהוָה	יּוֹם	קוֹל	וְ	
the mighty man	shall cry	there	bitterly	of the LORD	day	even the voice		
H1368	H8033	H6873	H4751	H3068	H3117	H6963		

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 30:3 (References Lord): For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen.

Malachi 4:5 (References Lord): Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

Joel 2:11 (References Lord): And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

Zephaniah 1:7 (References Lord): Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.

Isaiah 15:4 (Parallel theme): And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 (References Lord): For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Ezekiel 7:12 (Parallel theme): The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof.

Isaiah 33:7 (Parallel theme): Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly.

Acts 2:20 (References Lord): The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

James 5:9 (Parallel theme): Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.