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# **A Theological Motif of the Day of the Lord in the Minor Prophets: Its Implications for Christians Today**

**Emmanuel Aker Chia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Day of the Lord is a central motif in the Minor Prophets, encapsulating both divine judgment and hope for restoration. This theme prominent in the books of Joel, Amos, Zephaniah and Malachi, portrays a future moment when God intervenes decisively in human history to judge sin and establish righteousness. For Christians today, this motif carries profound implications. It serves as a reminder of God's holiness and the inevitability of divine justice, urging believers to live with moral integrity and accountability. This paper argues that the day of the Lord is a coherent theme in the Minor Prophets. It is the high point at which the prophets reconciled "The Day of the Lord", "judgment" and "salvation" together from the point of view of the deuteronomistic theology and the priestly point of view. Using a canonical critical and redaction approach, this paper shows that the prophecies of the Minor Prophets had an underlying harmony, sin, leading to judgment and consequent punishment, repentance, forgiveness, salvation and restoration. Ultimately, the Day of the Lord motif invites Christians to live as a faithful remnant, embodying justice, mercy and hope in a broken world.

**Keywords:** Day of the Lord, judgement, restoration, minor prophets and Christians

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the Old Testament the expression "Day of the Lord" occurs eighteen times in prophetic literature, most often in the books of Joel and Zephaniah. It is not found in Daniel. A similar expression that stands close to it is "on that day, " which occurs 208 times in the Old Testament; half the occurrences are in the prophets.<sup>1</sup> The earliest use of the term " Day of the Lord" in the prophets is found in Amos 5:18, where the prophet saw the day of the Lord as one of judgment for Israel ( also; Isa 2:12- 22; Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15,2:1; Zeph 1:7,14; Zech 14:1). But other nations too would have to face the day of the Lord (Isa 13:6-9; Jer 46:10; Joel 2:31; Obad 15). Subsequently, the term was used by both the major and minor prophets with prevalence in the minor prophets. Related expressions are "A day of the Lord" (Isa 2:12; Ezek 30: Zech 14:1); "a day of retribution" (Jer 46:10); "the Lord's day of retribution" (Isa 34:8); "the day of the Lord's wrath" (Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:18); "the day of the Lord's anger" (Zeph 2:3); "the day of the Lord's feast" (Zeph 1:8). "A day of trouble and confusion" (Isa 22:5), "on that day" (Ezek 45:22).<sup>2</sup>

The day of the Lord was first regarded as a day on which God would intervene to save his people Israel from any danger which threatened to overwhelm them. To this concept, the prophets added the idea of judgment not only on the enemies of Israel but the nation herself for breaking God's law and the covenant. Due to their impenitent behaviour, the belief that the nation would find salvation through a faithful remnant developed.<sup>3</sup> As prophecy continued, a new concept began to enter- eschatology which introduced elements that went beyond the usual historical nature of prophecy of seeing the day of the Lord as an event within historical reality, but as an occurrence at an unspecified

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<sup>1</sup>Elmer A. Martens. "Day of the Lord, God, Christ, the" *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. (Walter Elwell, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), p 231.

<sup>2</sup> Richard H. Hiers. "Day of the Lord" *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol2, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p 82.

<sup>3</sup> J. S Wright. "The Day of the Lord" *The New Bible Dictionary*, London: (Intervarsity press, 1970), p296.

future date and described in mythological and colourful terms.<sup>4</sup> These apocalyptic elements are found in Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah, Ezekiel and most noticeably in Daniel.<sup>5</sup>

The day of the Lord is, therefore, a moment of divine judgment, at first within history when God would save His people and judge their enemies. With God's prophets, it became a time when God would also judge Israel for neglect of the Law and breaking of the covenant. Gradually, the day was seen as postponed by God's divine purpose and ultimately became an apocalyptic event at the end of time in which the remnant of all nations will be saved, the evil punished, and God's eternal reign inaugurated.

This research paper, therefore, using the canonical critical and redaction approach will demonstrate how the theological motif of "the Day of the Lord" span through the minor prophets otherwise known as the "Book of the Twelve" and its implications for Christians today.

## THE DAY OF THE LORD IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

The minor prophets struggled with many questions that bothered their minds including: how can sin be overcome? How can judgment be turned into salvation and the covenant relationship with God restored? This study will show how the prophets answered these questions and many more.

### HOSEA

Hosea though a contemporary of Amos had a more positive outlook, God showed his burning love for Israel despite their sins. God is patient and wishes that they will return to him so that He will pour his love on them. The first four chapters of

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<sup>4</sup> Aelred Cody. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore publications India, 2004), p353.

<sup>5</sup> John Collins. *Old Testament Apocalypticism and Eschatology, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological publications, India, 2004), p298.

Amos provide a human parable in the form of the prophet's unflinching love for his unfaithful wife Gomer. Gomer represents sinful Israel, and the hurt but yet loving prophet, who hopes that Gomer having suffered for her sin will return to him, represents God.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, God is not bringing violent disaster to Israel, but letting her suffer the consequences of immorality, moral corruption and placing faith in other nations rather than in God himself (Hos 7:13-16). God will leave the nation to its own devices (4:6). It seems that Israel may be unable to respond to God. Chart sees the conclusion of the book as open-ended since we have no information as to whether Israel does respond ultimately to the dramatic final appeal to return to God in chapter 14:2-4. The answer to which we have to turn to the Book of the Twelve as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

The book of Hosea does not explicitly mention the “day of the Lord” or “the remnant”. God is concerned for all Israel in the here and now. What will replace judgment with salvation is wholehearted repentance: abandoning false gods (14:3), confession, true sacrifice (14:2), and complete reliance on God instead of worldly alliances (14:3), this will usher in a new and everlasting covenant with God.<sup>8</sup> God's love for his people has never been extinguished by the need for judgment.

## JOEL

When we study Joel in conjunction with Hosea we find correspondences. In the horror of the locust invasion, Joel calling for a return to God in 2:12-14, picks up the Hebrew phraseology

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<sup>6</sup> Orelli C. Von. *The twelve Minor Prophets*, Tr. J. S Banks, (Edinburgh: 1897), p12.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Schart. *The First Section of the Book of the Twelve Prophets. Interpretation* vol61, No 2, (Richmond, Virginia, April,2007), p141.

<sup>8</sup> Mc Carthy D.J. and Murphy Roland E. *Hosea, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore, Theological publications, India, 2004), p 219.

from Hosea 14:2–4. Apart from that, Joel is the sequel to Hosea in that, the latter concentrates on Israel's apostasy while the former (Joel) paying little attention to apostasy concentrates on repentance and return to God as a way of averting God's judgment. Although Joel's prophecy is directed at Judah and Hosea's at Israel at an earlier time, Hosea has warned Judah not to be infected by Israel's sin (Hos 4:15). In this sense both prophecies serve as a warning to the people of God in any age.<sup>9</sup>

Joel sees the "Day of the Lord" as one of dramatic judgment against the nations which have harmed God's people (3:1-3). This theme will be continued in Amos (1-3), where the surrounding enemy nations are named and even Judah and Israel are God's enemies. Only those who seek shelter on Mount Zion will be saved (Joel 2:32). This stresses a deuteronomistic point of view that God could only be properly worshipped on Mount Zion, not at other shrines at Bethel or Gilgal in the northern kingdom, supported by the prophecy of Amos "The Lord roars from Zion" (Amos 1:2).<sup>10</sup>

Joel (2:30) announces the "Day of the Lord", the place of Judgment will be the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2). For Judah it will be a day of deep inner repentance and fasting (2:12-17) which will unlock God's eternal blessings, the blessings of a gracious, compassionate long-suffering God. (2:13). Those who repent even at the last moment will be among the saved remnant (2:30-32). God will dwell on Mount Zion and the city will never again be invaded (3:17). The people will enjoy the blessings of abundant harvests free from scourges such as a locust plague used as a symbol of judgment at the beginning of Joel (2:25). Salvation for God's people will be a prelude to salvation for humanity (2:28).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Aaron Schart. *The First Book of the Twelve Prophets*, p 142--143.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 144-145.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 145

Some commentators, however, do not accept universalism in Joel maintaining that the seemingly universalistic references refer only to Israel in its widest sense.<sup>12</sup> For others, the key to escape from judgment is sincere repentance which would bring compassion not only upon God's chosen people who are his first concerns but also upon the rest of humanity who acknowledge him.<sup>13</sup>

## AMOS

The prophet Amos foresaw only the possibility of an insignificant remnant surviving (3:12; 5:3; 5:5) after God had judged Israel. He was less interested in the remnant than the thoroughness of God's judgment. There is no suggestion of salvation, the remnant although exhorted to turn to God (5:5) is not offered any definite reward. Five times in chapter 4, we have God accusing his people that they have failed to return to him (Amos 4:6,8,9,10,11). Here Schart sees Amos as picking up on the failures to repent despite the calls of Hosea and Joel.<sup>14</sup> Through judgment comes salvation. That day of salvation and judgment will come on the "Day of the Lord" which will be darkness, not light (5:18) in the sense that it will be a day in which Israel is forced to face her sins and God's judgment on them. Not a day of divine blessings on the chosen nation, light may eventually emerge from that darkness. The "Day of the Lord" in Amos will be a moment in which Judgment may later become salvation.

The above conclusion ignores the present ending of Amos (9:11-15) which was probably added editorially during the exile. This ending brings the book's outlook into line with the more usual outlook of the prophets when the "Day of the Lord" is seen as a

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Goldsmith. *Habakkuk and Joel – God is Sovereign in History*, (London: Marshalls, 1982), p 129

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p128; Elias Mallon. *Joel, Obadiah, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications, India, 2004), p399-403.

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Schart, p 144

day of both judgment and restoration.<sup>15</sup> It also means that in verses 8b-10, some of Jacob's descendants are survivors in a hostile world after the nation has suffered the judgment of destruction. This remnant becomes a remnant of hope once the sinners have been removed (9:9), as it is promised agricultural prosperity (9:13-15), restoration of territory (9:12), and the rule of the line of David (9:11).

The vision of restoration will take place in history (9:11,13). The Day of the Lord will therefore combine judgment and salvation. It will allow a new beginning within the history of the social, religious and political set-up developed during the history of Israel a nation now purged of sin and sinners. Emphasis is now shifted in this latter part of Amos from judgment to salvation. Judgment becomes a prelude to salvation which is a decision made by God alone without reference to any action by the remnant.<sup>16</sup>

## OBADIAH

In Obadiah, the "Day of the Lord" is a day of judgment on the nations who have acted ruthlessly against the kingdom of Israel and Judah. (15). Obadiah's prophecies were particular against Edom which changed sides from a coalition with Judah to the Babylonian side at the time of the conquest of Judah. Judah has already drunk God's wrath in defeat and exile (16). For the remnant who had survived defeat and exile, the day of the Lord's judgment on the nation is a day of salvation and vindication for God's people. Judah will receive the territory of her enemies effectively reuniting the nation with that of Israel (19-21). Mount Zion and Jerusalem will become the centre of the nation and its worship (17).

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Barre I. Amos. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications, India ,2004), p215.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron Schart, p145.

God has punished his people for their sins. If God cannot endure the sin of his people, how can he endure that of the gentile nations, especially when it affects the people bound to him by law and covenant? The suffering of his people has atoned for their sins and the time has come to show mercy through releasing them from the threats of their enemies. To Obadiah suffering would naturally produce repentance.

Allusions to Joel's eschatology (Joel 3) help to tie Obadiah into the overall scheme of judgment, salvation and the day of the Lord, as does the reference to Mount Zion as the starting place for a victorious battle of salvation.<sup>17</sup> There is no apparent suggestion of universal forgiveness and of the nation's coming to worship God in Jerusalem. However, God's punishment of the nations implies his power over them and may hint that after they have suffered, in due course they may turn to him.<sup>18</sup>

## JONAH

The book of Jonah is in two ways an encouragement to the people of Israel to repent and receive God's forgiveness. First, God forgives even Assyria who destroyed the kingdom of Israel. It is also a warning that Jerusalem can be destroyed unless it repents.<sup>19</sup> In historical terms Assyria would apply to the Persian empire, in canonical terms, it would apply to Assyria. In overall terms, the Book of the Twelve would be a more generalized warning, based on the experience of history. That God would forgive a foreign nation like Assyria was shocking news to the prophet.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark E Biddle. *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah in Canonical Context: The Nature of Prophetic Literature and Hermeneutics. Interpretation*, Vol. 61, No 2, (Richmond, Virginia, April, 2007), p 162.

<sup>18</sup> Elias Mallon, *Joel, Obadiah*, p405.

<sup>19</sup> Mark E. Biddle, p 160



Secondly, Assyria repented completely in sackcloth and ashes including the animals at the preaching of a reluctant prophet who represented the attitude of Israel toward gentile nations. The people of Israel and Judah had failed to repent after a long list of prophets had preached to them to which their defeat and exile were consequent. God is prepared to save only those who truly repent. Because of Jonah's disobedience, he was punished by being thrown overboard only to be saved by a whale. Despite the mercies shown to him by God, he was unable to understand the infinite quality of God's mercy and that He is free to show it to whom he will.<sup>20</sup> Jonah is not addressing a particular situation in Judah at a certain moment but is in the nature of an extended parable or allegory. It provides a comment on the necessity of repentance. It illustrates the extent of God's mercy which he does not limit to a narrow-minded and frequently disobedient people.<sup>21</sup>

## MICAH

With Micah we return to the idea of salvation of a remnant (4:7; 7:18). The 'Day of the Lord' is expressed here as "In Days to come" (4:1), "on that day" (4:6). References to the remnant in Micah 3:3 and Amos 5:15, help to link the two books. Such references may be a result of post-exilic redaction and a deliberate reference to Isaiah's theme of a remnant, helping to unite themes in the major and minor prophets (Isa 37).

Judgment expressed as nations gathering to attack Jerusalem is found in four places in Micah (4:1-4, 11-13; 5:1, 14). These verses echo others in the Minor Prophets (Joel 4:2, 9-17; Zeph 3:8; Zech 12:14). In some passages the "Day of the Lord" will be a surprise (Mic 4:11-13; Zeph 3:8; Zech 12). These passages are balanced by others of a redemptive nature when the nations travel to

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<sup>20</sup> Leslie Allen C. *Jonah, Theology of, New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis*, Vol 4, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p 799-800.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Ceresko R. *Habakkuk, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications India, 2004), p 580 -584.

Jerusalem to worship God (Mic 4:1-4; Zech 14:16-19). According to Biddle these possibly are conflicting ideologies.<sup>22</sup> It seems preferable to regard them as part of a carefully worked-out balance in the book between the concepts of judgment and salvation.

The two sections of Micah (1-4 and 5-7) parallel each other in that accusations of sin and judgment are balanced in each section with promises of salvation, suggesting that there is a purpose behind judgment beyond punishment. Punishment of its own is of little or no value unless it becomes part of the salvation of God's people and the restoration of their relationship with him.<sup>23</sup> Micah prophesied at a time of great Assyrian threat to Judah. The Assyrians were on a conquering mission, and the people of Judah were afraid that as it happened to Israel and other nations they would be deported and replaced by Assyrians. The only remnant would be left to return after Assyria is overthrown by God (5:5b-9). Amid judgment, how is God's mercy and salvation to be unlocked? Sacrifices will not work (6:6-7). The prophet reminds the people of God's primary requirements for them: Justice, loyalty, and humility (6:8).

Acknowledgement of sin by returning to God will release the benefits of God's justice, his abounding mercies, and his desire to save and restore his people. Enemies will be put to flight (7:10-13). God will become their shepherd and perform miracles for his people as he did in Egypt and this will cause awe among the nations (7:14-17). It will be a new exodus (7:19). But when these will happen is left to God to decide in his wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Micah foresaw it happening within the normal course of history. The

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<sup>22</sup> Mark E Biddle, p 156-157.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Redmond, Bill Curtis, and Ken Fentress. *Christ Catered Exposition, Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk*, (Nashville: B &H Publishing Group, 2016), p 97.

<sup>24</sup> William S Lasor, David A Hubbard, Frederick W Bush. *Old Testament Survey, The message, form and background to the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Pub co., 1996), p 220.

very suggestion that God requires right living from his people as a start to the process of redemption would suggest that Micah had no concept of a day of judgment and salvation in the future but in the status of life.<sup>25</sup> Joel and Jonah stress the need for repentance to unleash God's mercy. Micah adds to this the need for right living according to God's Law. Relationship with God requires humility, and patiently waiting on God to show his mercy and salvation. God's mercy is not limited to his own people; it extends to all nations.

This realization shows a development in the Israelite concept of God by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. First, God's attributes are unlimited. Second, He is God of mercy rather than of wrath and vengeance. There is always a tension between judgment and salvation. Both are divine prerogatives, humanity cannot unleash forgiveness, and human actions cannot affect God's power and decision, not even repentance. Everything depends on his generosity.<sup>26</sup>

## NAHUM

Nahum often arouses shock among readers, because it seems to glorify the violence and suffering caused to Nineveh. Female theologians sometimes object to an implied acceptance of rape as part of Assyria's punishment.<sup>27</sup> The book opens with a statement of God's jealousy, he detests anything which derogates his holiness. He is long-suffering but would not endure evil (1: 1-3). His power is displayed in the thoroughness and violent destruction of Nineveh. In the time of the prophet, it was a sign of God's justice. Nineveh was being paid in her coin for the cruelty it had perpetrated.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Laberge Leo, Micah. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications, India ,2004), p250.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Biddle, p 158.

<sup>27</sup> Julia O'Brien. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, (Nashville: Abingdon press, 2004), p 29.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 40.

For Nahum, it was not Babylon which defeated Assyria but God showing his power over the nations and their gods. This image is implied in Nahum, but occurs in the “book of the twelve” in Habakkuk 3 and Zechariah 13, thus helping to provide a link between pre and post-exilic prophecy.<sup>29</sup> God’s love for Judah is shown in his treatment of Nineveh and his justice in punishment is a sign of his concern for humanity. Nahum does not mention the “Day of the Lord” but the day of destruction of Nineveh may be regarded as a day of salvation for Judah and other nations which suffered the tyranny of Assyria.<sup>30</sup>

A God who does not care about injustice is not a loving God, the prophet’s oracles are ones of hope for an oppressed Judah, hence the meaning of his name “comfort”. In (1:15), we have the image of a messenger of good news running over the mountain to tell Judah about the defeat of Nineveh and to assure the nation that it can continue to worship its God.<sup>31</sup> The positioning of Nahum in the “Book of the Twelve” is important in that it precedes Habakkuk and Zephaniah both of which end with a positive view of God’s concern for Judah and in Zephaniah for the nations as well.<sup>32</sup> Even though there is no mention of a remnant in Nahum, it may be implied of those Judeans who survived Assyrian incursion and capture.

## HABAKKUK

Habakkuk sees the defeat of Assyria by the Chaldeans as God’s judgment on Judah’s enemy. At the same time, the prophet is concerned about why God permits injustice, violence and cruelty to occur. The Chaldeans were instruments in God’s hand to accomplish this purpose (1:6). This purpose will be revealed at

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<sup>29</sup> Julia O’Brien. *Nahum- Habakkuk- Zephaniah, Reading the Former Prophets in the Persian Period. Interpretation*, Vol. 6, No 2, 2007, p 175.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Emmerson. *Nahum to Malachi*, (Oxford Bible Reading Fellowship, 1998), p 15.

<sup>31</sup> Julia O’ Brien, 2004, p 56.

<sup>32</sup> Grace Emmerson, p 34.

the appropriate time (2:3). The Chaldeans too will be overthrown (2:4-8). Nahum begins with a warrior hymn; Habakkuk ends with one. The warrior imagery used by the two creates a unity of message in that they both stress the power God uses to fulfil his plans.<sup>33</sup> The five woes reveal that God does not tolerate injustice, immorality and idolatry; and that they contain within themselves the seed of their destruction (2:12-20).

It is not always possible to see clearly how God is working in the world, but it is always justly and for the salvation of the faithful. The faithful must live in trust that God will act.<sup>34</sup> The closest the prophet gets to the concept of the “Day of the Lord” is the “appointed time” (2:3). God will work within history at the time known only to him. To emphasise that people must live in faith in God, the prophet ends his oracles with a statement of faith. He will continue to believe in God despite failing crops and empty sheepfolds, in the certainty that God will save him (3:17-18).

## ZEPHANIAH

Julia O’Brien regards Zephaniah as a kind of summary of the minor prophets in canonical order from Hosea to Nahum and argues that this was consciously done by post-exilic redactors as an introduction to the prophet Zechariah.<sup>35</sup> Zephaniah 2: 4-15, echoes Nahum’s and Habakkuk’s views on God’s sovereignty over the nations. Zephaniah 3, connects punishment for Judah with punishment for the nations. The promise of salvation for Zion, “daughter of Jerusalem” (3:14-15), links with the imagery of Micah 4:8-13 and Zechariah 2:14; 9:9. Zechariah’s list of Philistine cities in his oracles against various nations follows the list of these cities in Zephaniah 2. These passages whether

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<sup>33</sup> Julia O’Brien, 2007, p 170

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 2004, p 80

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 2007, p 177

deliberately edited or not unify the theme of judgment and salvation in the “Book of the Twelve”.<sup>36</sup>

Though Zephaniah has three chapters, he proportionately mentions the “Day of the Lord” more frequently than any other prophet, eleven times, with two indirect references. For him, it is a day of destruction for the arrogant, and salvation for a purified remnant.<sup>37</sup> Zephaniah describes the “Day of the Lord” even in more miserable terms than Amos:

*That day will be a day of wrath,*

*a day of distress and anguish,*

*a day of trouble and ruin,*

*a day of darkness and gloom,*

*a day of clouds and blackness-*

*a day of trumpet and battle cry,*

*against the fortified cities*

*and against the corner towers. (Zeph 1:15-16. NIV).*

God’s judgment is against the nations including Judah. His exiled people will turn to him and bring sacrificial offerings (3:9), and the people of the nations who have survived his wrath (3:8), will call on his name with purified lips (3:9). Only a remnant will remain, the lowly and the poor who know their dependence on God (3:12), the proud and arrogant will be destroyed (3:11). The Day of the Lord will be a “festal day” a day of rejoicing (3:18), when God having averted the destruction of Zion will be in their

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p 180.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Wahl P. Zephaniah. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications, India, 2004), p 255.

midst and like a warrior, will protect them (3:17). The fortunes of his people will be restored in their eyes (3:20).

What is the key to God's apparent change of heart? If the people humble themselves before the day of God's anger to seek righteousness and humility (2:2; 3:11). Once again we see that what God requires of his people is a change of attitude toward God and one's neighbour. To Zephaniah righteousness can only come through the practice of justice and not by ritual sacrifices. Assyria and Babylon who were once used as God's instruments to punish other nations will not escape punishment for their cruelty, pride and greed (2:12-15). No nation is beyond God's judgment.<sup>38</sup> Punishment for Judah and other nations is preparation for salvation. It turns the hearts of the survivors to acknowledge God and to live according to his Laws. The glory and rejoicing of having God in their midst will replace the agony of punishment. For Zephaniah Jerusalem will not be rebuilt but saved at the last moment from destruction (3:15). Judgment is a path to salvation and rebuilding the nation. Ultimately God is a God of restoration and reversals rather than of punishment.<sup>39</sup> The love of God, however, is not sentimental, it requires divine action, even severe action against evil and wrongdoing.<sup>40</sup>

## HAGGAI

With the return of the exiles from Babylon, prophet Haggai turned his message to the remnant. He pointed out that they are living comfortably, even luxuriously in well-built houses, but no attempt has been made to rebuild God's temple. As a result, God is not dwelling with them (1:1-6). They have effectively brought judgment upon themselves, and what they must have regarded as their salvation has proved unsatisfactory to them. Their sins are not those of injustice, but indifference. If they rebuild the

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<sup>38</sup> Julia O'Brien, 2004, p 130.

<sup>39</sup> Grace Emmerson, p 76

<sup>40</sup> Julia O'Brien, 2004, p 130

temple God will come and dwell in it, so that its glory will be greater than Solomon's temple (2:9).

God is planning a shakeup of all the nations "in a little while" and their treasure will flow into Jerusalem (2:6-9). This "in a little while" is the closest that Haggai gets to the "Day of the Lord". The moment will come within historical time. This will be an omen of good things to come: judgment for the nations and riches and plenty for Israel. Zerubbabel will become God's "signet ring" (2:23) as a descendant of the Davidic line. Kings will be overthrown and heathen nations defeated (2:22). A restored Judah will again become a nation of power.

However, Zerubbabel faded from the scene and Judah never regained her power, remaining a small province of a mighty empire for about another 200 years. Haggai contains, nonetheless the essentials of the prophetic message of judgment and salvation. The remnant has not been faithful and is suffering judgment in the present. If they become faithful and rebuild the Temple, judgment will be lifted and they will enjoy the fullness of God's salvation.<sup>41</sup>

## ZECHARIAH

In Zechariah, the restoration of Judah takes an instant form. Rather than referring to a future "Day of the Lord". The prophet gives God's word as "Now, says the Lord, I shall come back to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem" (8:3). His return will be the result of the rebuilding of the Temple (8:9-11). The immediacy of God's return is further stressed by the "Now" in two places (8:9 and v13) and by the phrase "in these days" (8:15). The promise of immediate return is accompanied by the warning that the people must live in honesty and with Justice (8:16-17). Fasts will be turned into festivals (8:19), Israel's greatest glory will be the recognition of the nations that God is with them, and they desire

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<sup>41</sup> Grace Emmerson, p 90.



to worship in Jerusalem (8:22). In those days, ten people from nations of every language will take hold of the robe of one Jew and say, "Let us accompany you, for we have heard that God is with you" (8:23).

Thus, we see that because of the nation's sins, they had been exiled to Babylon. In his mercy God allowed them to return to Jerusalem and Judah but they did not experience his presence with them because they neglected God, first looking to their own interests, building comfortable houses and seeking to re-establish their farms. They had neglected to rebuild the Temple and to bring his worship into it. Only after Haggai and Zechariah had prophesied that they realise the need to do so. Now that they acknowledged God in their deeds and word he has returned to them and they will become the glory of all humanity. Thus fulfilling God's promises to Abraham their ancestor.<sup>42</sup>

God is a God of harmony. The nation's acknowledgement of God brought harmony within them, it also restored harmony between them and God (8:10-12). Through God's people, harmony was brought among the nations. The change from judgment to salvation is described as a change from being proverbial as a curse to becoming proverbial as a blessing (8:13). This provides an interesting reference to the cursing law referred to in Chapter 2. Where the breaking of God's law could result in the perpetrators being placed under a curse. In bringing about the full earthly and spiritual salvation of his people. God has lifted the curse which he had placed upon them and replaced it with blessings.<sup>43</sup>

In chapters 9-14 of Zechariah, we have two oracles referring to God's salvation of his people. In the first collection (9-11), Judah will triumph over her enemies, not in the nation's strength but

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<sup>42</sup> Austel Hermann J. Zechariah. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, Eds. Garry M. Burge, Andrew Hills E, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), p 1268.; Grace Emmerson, p 126.

<sup>43</sup> Aelred Cody, p 356; Julia O'Brien, 217

because “the word of the Lord” is on the surrounding nations and will cause them to live in fear of God and obedience to his commandments (9:1-8). The people of Jerusalem will rejoice at the coming of a humble prince of peace riding upon a donkey and everything to do with war will be banished from his territory (9:9-11). They will rejoice at being jewels in God’s crown and have plenty (9:11-17). Chapter 10 is one of rejoicing at God’s salvation of his people and punishment of corrupt political and religious leaders, foreign deports, and Israel’s recognition that its strength is in God (10:1-12). Chapters 9 and 10 echo in many ways the prophecy in chapter 8. The exiles have been punished, but God’s judgment always has an element of mercy, and in his mercy restores an exiled people. Chapter 11 may be an indication that his mercy may be overturned if the people and rulers again become disobedient.<sup>44</sup>

From chapters 12 to 14 we return to the imagery which are common in the “Book of the Twelve”. We have a constant repetition of the phrase “on that day” (12: 3; 13:1; 14:6; et al). We also encounter the idea of a remnant that will be saved and purified (13: 8-9). Also, half the city is referred to as going into exile (14:2). The nations which attack Jerusalem will be defeated and it will be God who wins the victory. Jerusalem will acknowledge that its strength is in the name of the Lord (12:1-3). The process of change continues in chapter 13. They will wash themselves in the fountain of repentance and will be ashamed of their past attitudes and actions, and it is in the process of cleansing that only a remnant will be left who acknowledge God as Lord.

In chapter 14, in a powerful eschatological and or apocalyptic image, God is pictured as a giant warrior dispensing justice on the nations standing on the mount of Olives while a chasm opens up through the mountain on which Jerusalem stands

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<sup>44</sup> John McKenzie J. *Aspects of Old Testament Thought, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore Theological Publications India, 2004), p 1314.

(14:3-5). It will be perpetual daylight (14:6-7). After a period of warfare, Judah will inherit the wealth of the nations (14:13-14). Everyday objects like bridles and pots will be holy, and sacred Temple objects and everyone will be able to participate in the rituals of the Temple which will be cleansed of all trading activities (14:20-21). So the “Day of the Lord” in chapter 14, is apocalyptic, a reminder of God’s power, and that God’s judgment can be one of severity for those who continue to refuse to accept Godly dispensation for humanity. Zechariah stresses a vision of a world in which all respond to God, Hebrew or Gentile and worship him, and in which all things are holy. In order to achieve this state, God may have to punish those who violate his laws and nature, saving only a remnant of his people and of the nations.<sup>45</sup>

## MALACHI

By the time Malachi prophesied, the idea of Temple reconstruction and worship in Jerusalem had faded, as had the hope of restoration of the Davidic line under Zerubbabel.<sup>46</sup> Worship of God in Judah was now casual, where offering imperfect animals and unwillingness to pay tithes were prevalent. The Gentiles were being more faithful in their offerings (1;11-14; 3:8-10). Divorce became frequent (2:14-16), and the people accepted evil as good (2:17). Malachi’s call is one of renewal, not only in ritual matters of sacrifices and tithes but also in moral behaviour affecting marriage but also mistreating a labourer over his wages, not caring for widows, orphans and aliens (3;5). Malachi’s version of the “Day of the Lord” is that it will be a terrifying day of purification and refining (3:2-3). The arrogant who refuse to acknowledge God and those who willfully do evil will be burned as stubble (4:1).

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<sup>45</sup> Aelred Cody. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p 357-359.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p 360

However, for those who are righteous, who offer the right sacrifices, pay tithes, and act honestly, fairly and generously to labourers, the poor, widows and aliens, there will be blessings of plentiful harvest (3:10-12). Salvation for Malachi is for those who have come through judgment because they have been obedient or have repented. A new concept is that the names of the faithful are being recorded so that God would know whom to condemn and to save (3:16).<sup>47</sup> For Haggai and Zechariah, the “Day of the Lord” was the day of return to Jerusalem. For Malachi, it is a day to come on which a remnant of those who have repented or who have remained faithful will be saved. Paul Redditt finds these three post-exilic books tightly unified through their overarching theme: the restoration of Judah and its salvation. God uses the Chaldean or Persian empire’s defeat of Babylon to bring this about so that the exiles would be allowed to return home.<sup>48</sup> The rebuilding of the Temple, the establishment of the priestly line under Joshua and a kingly line under Zerubbabel descendant of David were to be part of salvation in Haggai and Zechariah. In Malachi, the priesthood had fallen on its duties where sacrifices and tithes were concerned. Malachi recalls the people to covenant obedience; Haggai and Zechariah to obedience in rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the cult. Other themes involve those of poverty for not fulfilling religious duties of rebuilding and tithing.<sup>49</sup>

In both Zechariah and Malachi, God is seen as a refiner (Zech 13:9; Mal:3:2-3) and as king (Zech 14:9; Mal 14:1). Punishment through drought and poor harvest is the judgment of failure to fulfil religious duties. On the other hand, good harvests are the assurance of full salvation in the land of plenty with God as king.<sup>50</sup> Despite the attempt to link closely these last three books,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p361

<sup>48</sup> Paul Redditt. *Eschatology in the Old Testament. Mercer Dictionary of the Bible.* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), p 260

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 261

<sup>50</sup> Paul Redditt. (Eschatology in the Old Testament), p 188.

it should be pointed out that there are contrary points in this depiction of God turning judgment into salvation, but all three prophets are in agreement that God has saved his people by restoring a remnant to Judah. The fact that Malachi had to recall the people to proper worship and to care for the poor, widows, orphans and strangers is also a reminder of past prophecies. Malachi unlike Haggai and Zerubbabel, takes us back to the moral and religious concerns of the pre-exilic prophets, in a sense “the book of the twelve” has come to full circle.

#### A THEOLOGICAL MOTIF OF THE DAY OF THE LORD IN THE MINOR PROPHETS.

The “Day of the Lord” is not necessarily a day in the sense of twenty-four hours, but is a moment determined by God within history or at the end of time, when judgment takes place and passes into salvation for the Israelites and Gentiles set aside for it. Some recent scholars have looked at thematic links within the Twelve as a means of binding the material together. Rolf Rendtorff has argued, in two extremely similar essays, that there is a consistent 'Day of the Lord' idea running through the Minor Prophets.<sup>51</sup> The metaphors used by the prophets are vivid: drought (Hag 1:11), locust plague (Joel 1:4; Am 7:1), fire (Joel 2:30; Am 7:4), seismic events (Zech 14:5) and the horrors of war (Mic 5:10-11). Such metaphors have been used to emphasize the horror of God's judgment. God, however, is not a bloodthirsty tyrant like the rulers of Assyria or like Nebuchadnezzar at his worst, but acts justly.

Among the minor prophets, Hosea is probably the most aware of God's love for his people, hence the allegory of his relationship with Gomer. During the wilderness years and up to the time of

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<sup>51</sup> Rolf Rendtorff. 'How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity', in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers: One Hundred Thirty-Third Annual Meeting, November 22-25, 1997, San Francisco* (Atlanta: Scholars Press); 'Alas for the Day! The "Day of the Lord" in *the Book of the Twelve*, in T. Linafeldt and T.K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p258.

Amos, God was seen more as a God of justice and punishment. He punished the people because they had broken the covenant with him (Am 2: 4-8).

If nine of the prophetic books in the Minor Prophets can be argued to have conceived of a “Day of the Lord”, it indicates that it was a concept which was current in religious thought at least from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards.<sup>52</sup> The redactors likely saw in the frequent mention of the idea a theme which linked the outlook of the prophets, which they now sought to highlight. By editing the individual books, the redactors were simply highlighting and emphasizing God’s message, and this was a godly thing to do.

Also, the editors saw in the presentation of the “Day of the Lord” a development of what the day entailed. Until the time of Amos, was a time of punishment reserved for the enemies of Israel. Amos made a shocking assertion that not only the nations but Israel and Judah would be judged and punished (Am 2:4-8). The purpose of punishment surely, is to cause the people to repent. And repentance calls for a response from God – forgiveness, and forgiveness must be shown in some kind of way and that is salvation. Salvation must take the form of restoration which entails a return to the relationship between God and Israel before it was broken. This will require a return to covenant obedience: acknowledgement of Yahweh as the sole God of Israel, right worship and right treatment of neighbour.

At first, restoration was interpreted in terms of bringing back God’s people into the promised land under the rule of a king of the Davidic line (Am 9:11). Those who returned from exile in Babylon were a remnant permitted by God to take up residence again in the promised land. That this group had not repented fully is shown by their neglect condemned by Haggai and Zechariah, to rebuild the Temple while they lived in comfortable

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 24.

houses (Hag 1:3-11; Zech 7:8; 8:9). As a way of second judgment, they loosed their hoped-for king and remained in servitude to the Persian empire. They had to look for a second salvation, expressed in apocalyptic terms in Zechariah 14. Micah continued with this outlook: from sin - judgment - punishment -repentance -forgiveness - salvation. Henceforth, the people would act justly and walk humbly and loyally with God (Mic 4:1-8; 6;8). For Zephaniah, judgment was a form of purification of a repentant remnant leading to salvation (Zeph 3;11-20). Joel understood that the day of the Lord would be a day of deep repentance (Joel 2:18-3:3). For Malachi, it was also a turning to God (Mal 3:16-17;4:2).

For many of the “twelve” those who could be saved came to include other nations (Jon 4;1-3; Mic 7:17; Zeph 3: 8; Zech 14:6). This portrays a shift in theological thinking from judgment on foreign nations because they did not worship Yahweh or were enemies of Israel, to all nations being saved provided that they repented. Emphasis is moving from judgment to salvation through repentance. Israel had settled amongst the Canaanites and so copied their beliefs and customs (10:1-2), which led to the exile of both Israelite kingdoms. Using other nations to punish Israel proves that he is God not just of Israel but of other mighty nations. He must be God of all nations and God of their gods. Such realization played a part in developing the religious outlook of the people of Israel from Yahwistic pluralism through monolatry to monotheism.<sup>53</sup>

We have also seen that in the “Book of the Twelve” the eschatological outlook of the prophets has moved from the “Day of the Lord” being an event that will happen in history, first, soon, then later at an intermediate date, to an event that seems to take place at the end of time. The 8<sup>th</sup>-century prophecies of Amos and Hosea saw the imminent punishment of the Israelite

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<sup>53</sup> Rainer Albertz. *Religion in Pre-exilic Israel. The Biblical World*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p 106-108.

kingdom through the hands of Assyria, which also took place comparatively within a short time. The prophecies of Micah against Judah, however, did not come to pass even after 200 years. Even, the prophecies of the 7<sup>th</sup> century prophets (Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk) against Judah took nearly a century to materialize. Proving that God acted in history but according to his timing. There was a crisis in prophecy when the belief that the returned exiles would be governed by a descendant of David could not come to fruition after centuries had passed. Eschatology had to be rethought, the “Day of the Lord” was going to come at the end of time with a new Israel under the eternal kingship of God. And this new Israel would consist of not only the Israelite but all those who faithfully acknowledge and worship Yahweh (Zech 14:16-19).

The idea of the “Day of the Lord” as one of judgment and consequent punishment changes, so that these acts become seen as a necessary prelude to repentance so that God’s love may be shown in salvation. Thus the “Day of the Lord” becomes a moment at the end of time inaugurating a new creation in which the acts of judgment, punishment, repentance and salvation become one. At the moment salvation takes place, God begins to reign in his kingdom eternally. Covenant is everlastingly restored and the Law is written on the hearts of humanity in such a way that it will never again desire to be disobedient (Jer 31:33).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY.

The “Day of the Lord” as seen and understood in the minor prophets has far-reaching implications for Christians today. The fundamental questions Christianity struggle with concerning the “Day of the Lord” are: when will the end of time occur and what will be the nature of this ultimate “Day of the Lord”? The Christian answer remains that the “Day” will take place when God decides it is right. The apocalyptic nature of the “Day” is



influenced by prophetic metaphors such as fire and battle. The final battle between forces of good and evil in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2) and Jerusalem (Zech 14). For the early Christians, the failure of an imminent second coming and persecution would lead to the adoption of an apocalyptic outcome described in the book of Revelation.<sup>54</sup> Jerusalem also takes a decidedly otherworldly aspect, described in terms of gold and jewellery in an attempt to describe its spiritual beauty and heavenly nature (Rev 21:15-21).

The “Day of the Lord” without a doubt is a day of God’s vindication. In the battle between evil and good, it is God who is victorious and vindicated. He is the ultimate power against whom no force can stand (Isa 2:17). God’s summons of the nations for an accounting in Joel 3 and Zephaniah and the description of the universe being annihilated through fire (2 Peter 3:10-13) are two impressive ways of insisting on the truth that God is fully in charge. The preview of the day of the Lord, as in the destruction of Babylon or at the time of the Christ-event, including the day of Pentecost, already shows evidence of God’s extraordinary work and power, so that the day of the Lord at the end of history is quite beyond human description.

The Day of Yahweh addresses the question of theodicy, not only the existence of evil but especially undoing the disorder that it brings and making all things right. Uncertainties will be resolved. The message of the day of the Lord is that evil will be conquered and evildoers will in the end receive their due. God will settle his accounts with all the ungodly, arrogant, prideful, and hostile against the Almighty. On the other hand, the scenes about God’s blessing and the recovery of an original creation will continue to offer hope for those whose trust is in God (2 Pet 3:13).

The coming of the “Day of the Lord” is sure, a day with its dark side of judgment and its bright side of a massive transformation

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<sup>54</sup> George Eldon Ladd. *The Presence of the Future*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1974), p 43-44.

surrounding human beings, human society, and the world's physical environment, it calls on believers particularly, to live in its light. The purpose of discussions about the day of the Lord, past or future, is to illumine the present. Peter's question is rhetorical but pointed. Because of the coming day of the Lord, "What kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Pet 3:11).

The question of when will the "Day of the Lord" occur has remained a mystery over the years. Theodore of Mopsuestia regards the day of the Lord simply as a point in time at which everything will turn out that God decrees against them.<sup>55</sup> Cassiodorus discusses divergent opinions about when the day of the Lord may come. Some hold that they can determine the date to be in six thousand years, for "before his sight a thousand years are as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8), and the six thousand years will inaugurate eternity, while others argue that it would come after seven thousand years, for the resurrection of Christ took place the day after the Sabbath. Cassiodorus rejects these speculations, citing the gospel teaching that "not even the Son knows this day," (Mk 13:28-33) for it is churlish to be too eager to seek what divine Providence has declined to reveal to us in our own interests.<sup>56</sup> What is required of humans today is repentance, to get prepared for that day. While it is a fearful time for the wicked, the day of the Lord will be a happy day for the elect.

## CONCLUSION.

From what we have seen, the "Day of the Lord" is a time when justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, when worship and ethical praxis go hand in hand, and when economic prosperity does not lead to self-indulgence and aggrandizement that turns justice into poison

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<sup>55</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia. *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, Tr. Robert C. Hill, FC 101, 102, (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), p 292.

<sup>56</sup> Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms*, Tr. P. G. Walsh, 3 Vols, Ancient Christian Writers, 51,52,53, (New York: Paulist Press,1990), p 90.

and the fruit of righteousness into downside. It will be a time when ethical responsibilities are required of a people called to be holy as the Holy One of Israel, who desires justice and righteousness for all (Am 5:24).

Significantly, the Bible does not give a unified title, such as the “Book of the Twelve” to the works of the Minor Prophets as indicated by Ben Zvi<sup>57</sup> in his criticism of the editorial approach. The redactors of the Twelve were obviously in agreement in that, although they had tried to show that all the Minor Prophets had an underlying similarity of outlook, they acknowledged, that the prophets were sufficiently different in approach as to allow them to be read as separate authors. So as we conclude as to how the “Day of the Lord” reconciles Judgment and Salvation, we have to acknowledge that the prophets show differences in interpretation as to how this will occur, while at the same time, they see the “Day of the Lord” as being the occasion on which God will turn Judgement into Salvation.

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<sup>57</sup> Paul House, Endings as New Beginnings – Returning to the Lord, The Day of Renewal in the Book of the Twelve in Redditt Paul, and Schart Aaron, *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, p 316.

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