

What A Difference A Day Makes

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What a difference a day made
Twenty-four little hours
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain.
—Stanley Adams¹

We understand that the Day of the Lord is not a literal twenty-four-hour day, but an entire year. This is shown most explicitly in Isaiah 34:8, where the prophet writes, “For it is the *day* of the Lord’s vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion.” In some prophetic contexts, the Bible uses the principle of a day representing a year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), and the principle appears to apply in this instance. Certainly, the Bible’s descriptions of the devastations God will bring upon the earth and its rebellious and sinful peoples will take longer than one physical day to enact (see, for instance, the seven last plagues in Revelation 16).

Still, we cannot help but be stunned nearly witless, as we read the Scriptures concerning that long “day,” our heads spinning as we think of the astonishing difference a relatively short period of time will bring to this planet. God will draw a number of tools out of His tool-box to fashion that change: Earthquake, volcanism,² fire and water—probably the most unlikely combination. Fire and water.

Unlikely, but not uncommon, as fire and water frequently appear in conjunction in the Scriptures. Consider Leviticus 1:9, where washing with water precedes the burnt offering, or Matthew 3:11, where John the Baptist speaks of baptism of fire and baptism of water, virtually in the same breath.

Numbers 31:22-23 provides another fine example. Both fire and water can serve as cleansing agents in the purification of objects taken as booty in war. (Remember, the Day of the Lord is likened to a day of war; see Joel 3:9-16; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1-4.)

Even though gold, silver, brass, iron, tin and lead can all withstand fire, so that you are indeed to purify everything made of these materials by having them pass through fire; nevertheless they must also be purified with the water for purification. Everything that can’t withstand fire you are to have go through the water. (*Complete Jewish Bible*)

Fire and water are *both* cleansing agents. Substances that can withstand the rigors of fire, like metals, are to be passed through it *and* then purified with the water of purification. Combustible objects, like cloth, are to be purified only with water.⁴

All Green Grass Burns

With the requirement of using both fire and water to purify noncombustible objects, the Revelator’s comments in Revelation 8:7 take on new meaning: “The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth.”

Here, an angel throws hail *and* fire on the earth, from above.⁵ What is thrown down is mixed with blood in that they cause great destruction, as verse 7 illustrates: “And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up” (*English Standard Version* [ESV]).

Wheat—as well as rye and other grains, of course—are grasses. So, if this passage is referring to grasses that provide staple foodstuffs, then the impact of this first trumpet plague is indeed almost unimaginably vast. Whatever its cause, it is responsible for the burning of a third of the planet.⁶

Revelation 16:8-9 provides more information about the role of the sun, this time in the context of a description of the Fourth Bowl: “The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat” [ESV].

Revelation 18:8-9 gives yet another example of the destruction caused by fire. This passage describes the final destruction of Babylon:

For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her. (ESV)

In summary, these passages in the book of Revelation speak of intense heat, apparently generated by the sun. Unlike volcanic activity, which comes from below (that is, inside the planet), this fire comes from *above*. In Isaiah 30:26, the prophet Isaiah makes a statement that may elaborate on the role of the sun in the Day of the Lord: “Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.”

Most sixth graders can easily enough deduce the meaning of “the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun.” The moon reflects the sun’s light, so if the sun were to increase in strength sevenfold, the moon’s light would increase commensurately. While some folk interpret the increase in the sun’s brightness to be symbolic, relating it to Christ’s radiance and such, a literal meaning is more pertinent.

How Average Can a Star Be?

A conventional view of the sun is that it is a “main sequence” star. Astronomers classify stars on a continuum based on size and heat, both of which relate to internal characteristics of a star. Some are red, some white, some small, some big, some hotter than others. Average stars are classified in the “main sequence.” In the past, the sun was considered main sequence, that is, as stars go, pretty much as an average Joe.

More recently, however, scientists who study these things have come to view the sun as at least a mildly *variable* star. A variable star is usually not main sequence. It is one that, for any number of reasons, fluctuates in brightness. One reason for this fluctuation can be the internal functioning in the star. These stars expel large amounts of matter, usually in the form of gas, and with it, heat, light, and what is called solar wind.⁷ When it expels gas and solar wind, as in the coronal mass ejection of 1989, it not only affects brightness and heat, but it plays havoc with the earth’s magnetic fields. It is becoming apparent, too, that this disruption can, in turn, trigger seismic and volcanic activity.

How disruptive is disruptive? Well, the coronal mass ejection of 1989 turned out the lights in large areas of northeast America for days. A similar event in 2012 was absolutely massive, but missed the earth. If a major flare or coronal mass ejection came close to the earth, it could well lead to the levels of destruction we read of in Isaiah 30 and Revelation 8, 16, and 18.

What a difference can a single day bring? Lika Guha-thakurta, a NASA scientist, writes in NASA Science News:

The sun . . . is a variable star. But it looks so constant. . . . That's only a limitation of the human eye. Modern telescopes and spacecraft have penetrated the sun's blinding glare and found a maelstrom of unpredictable turmoil. Solar flares explode with the power of a billion atomic bombs. Clouds of magnetized gas . . . big enough to swallow planets break away from the stellar surface. Holes in the sun's atmosphere spew million mile-per-hour gusts of solar wind. And those are the things that can happen in just one day.

Here are a few of the many scriptures that might refer to intense solar activity during the Day of the Lord (or even during the Tribulation):

» Deuteronomy 32:22: Intriguingly, in the Song of Moses, God refers to His use of heat as He punishes apostate Israel. This passage describes an extremely intense, penetrating fire.

For a fire is kindled by My anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol,
devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the
mountains. [ESV]

» Isaiah 11:15: Here, God says He will

. . . utterly destroy
the tongue of the Sea of Egypt,
and will wave His hand over the River
with His scorching breath. . . . [ESV]

» II Peter 3:7: Peter's comments here may refer to the Day of the Lord.

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for
fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.
[ESV]

Water Up to the Neck!

Let us go back to Isaiah 30:27-28 as we turn our attention to God's use of the second tool in His toolbox, water.

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar,
burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke;
His lips are full of fury,
and His tongue is like a devouring fire. . . .

Notice now how the image changes from fire to water in verse 28:

His breath is like an overflowing stream
that reaches up to the neck. . . .

Verse 30:

And the Lord will cause His majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of His arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.

Of course, with the word “like” in verse 28, this description could be figurative. That is also the case with other passages that conjoin the images of fire and water, as in Micah 1:4:⁸

And the mountains will melt under him,
and the valleys will split open,
like wax before the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.

Yet, there can be no question about Christ’s comment to John in Revelation 11:19, where it is clear we are not dealing with figurative language:

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of His covenant was seen within His temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. [ESV]

We will not long conjecture about the physical mechanism God might use to bring about these hail storms, these apparently supercell cloudbursts. Answers in Genesis, a creationist website, discusses geological evidence that powerful hurricanes, called hypercanes, were spawned by conditions (such as a warming of the planet’s oceans) prevalent just after the Flood. While hurricanes might impact local regions, a hypercane could conceivably effect whole continents, lasting for weeks, generating winds of 500 miles per hour. It is possible that massive geographic formations such as the Grand Canyon were formed by hypercanes. Possibly, the disruption of the planet’s magnetic fields by intense solar activity could trigger hypercanes during the Day of the Lord, causing terrific storms, as well as earthquakes.

Nothing Indiscriminate About That Day!

This is the realm of conjecture, surely. What is clear, however, is that Christ will use *both* fire and water to purify the planet in preparation for His return. Moreover, what is absolutely vital for God’s people to remember is that *He will remain in total control during this time*. There will be nothing random about the Day of the Lord.

How many of us can provide anecdotal evidence that a tornado can destroy one house, while leaving the homes next door virtually untouched? Clearly, God is able to use the forces at His disposal *selectively*, such that those individuals He has chosen to live into the Millennium will remain safe, while others will die.⁹ Think of it this way: Those hailstones thrown down will be like smart-bombs. God will direct each one to strike what He wants it to strike, pulverizing it, burying it—and nothing else.

In Jeremiah 43, the prophet Jeremiah provides an excellent example of the level of control God maintains in an *apparently* chaotic situation.¹⁰ The context is the prophecy that Nebuchadnezzar will conquer Egypt.

[Nebuchadnezzar] will defeat Egypt. He will bring death to those who are supposed to die. He will capture those who are supposed to be captured. He will kill in battle those who are supposed to be killed in battle. (Jeremiah 43:11, *God's Word Translation*)

Other translations use verbals such as *doomed* or *destined*, as “those who are destined to die,” or “those doomed for captivity.” In the thick of battle, with confusion everywhere, God will remain in control. He knows *precisely* whom He wants to live and whom He wants to die. Nebuchadnezzar did not have that knowledge; his generals did not; and certainly, his foot soldiers did not. If they had known it, they could not reliably have implemented God's will in the heat of battle.

God, though, knew His plans for each individual and controlled the situation precisely to bring about His planned end. That is why God can be so specific in Ezekiel 5:1-2, using the fraction “one-third.” God will maintain control to ensure that one-third will be burned in the fire, another third scattered in the wind, and so on.

An echo of this concept of control sounds in Christ's words, recorded at Revelation 13:10:

If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;

if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain. [ESV]

Interestingly, this verse ends with a call for patience and faith during extremely rough times: “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.” The horrific events of the Day of the Lord might well cause God's elect to question His level of control—perhaps even His beneficence. This will be a year requiring consummate faith and patience on the part of God's people. They must truly know that God's actions during that Day will not be chaotic or haphazard in any way, but highly orchestrated by Him.

In 1920, Robert Frost published a poem “Fire and Ice.”¹¹ Its first lines read, “Some say the world will end in fire, / Some say in ice.” He concludes that either fire or ice “would suffice.” The poet lacks God's perspective. Using *both* fire and ice, the sovereign God will cleanse, punish, and terraform on a vast scale—all the while selectively protecting a relatively small remnant, those destined to enter the wonderful World Tomorrow.

And what a difference that world will be from today's!

End Notes

¹ The music and original lyrics were originally written by the Mexican songwriter, Maria Grever, under the title, “When I Return to Your Side.” Stanley Adams wrote the English lyrics, renaming the song, “What a Difference a Day Made.” It was popularized by

Dinah Washington, who won a Grammy Award in 1959 for her R&B version, renamed “What a Difference a Day Makes.” There have been many covers.

² Earthquakes and volcanic activity are out of the scope of discussion here. A rough count finds no less than eleven prophetic references to them in the Bible, as well as a number of historical references. Revelation refers to them five times. One, mentioned in Revelation 16:17-20, will be so great as to cause “every island” to flee away and all mountains to vanish. Usually, volcanic activity is associated with earthquakes.

⁴ A third cleansing agent, aside from water and fire, is blood.

For more information about the water of purification (also called “the water of separation”), see Numbers 19:11.

As an aside, compare Deuteronomy 32:43. Here, in the Song of Moses, Moses says God will cleanse (or purify) His peoples’ land and the people themselves. This is in context of God taking vengeance, so it clearly pertains to the Day of the Lord. Part of this cleaning may be the creation of a “pure language” (Zephaniah 3:9).

⁵ This is somewhat in contrast to the Flood, where God opened the fountains of the deep (see Genesis 7:11-12).

⁶ However, assuming that this one-third is contiguous is not warranted by the passage.

⁷ Many pulsate on a schedule, and as a general rule, the longer the period between pulsations, the more intense the pulsations.

⁸ Or consider, in this example, a case where water is not mentioned:

Seek the Lord and live,
lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel. . . .
(Amos 5:6, *English Standard Version*)

⁹ Note Job 1:21: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” The giving and taking of life is God’s prerogative now. There is no reason to assume that He will vacate that prerogative during the Day of the Lord.

¹⁰ A second witness of this concept, using similar rhetoric, appears at Jeremiah 15:2:

And when they ask you, “Where shall we go?” you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord:

Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence,
and those who are for the sword, to the sword;

those who are for famine, to famine,
and those who are for captivity, to captivity.”
(*English Standard Version*)

¹¹ Frost’s complete poem reads:

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.