

**THE DAY OF YAHWEH. PART OF A
DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL, IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY
(DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT
LITERATURE AND INTERPRETATION)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649234066

The Day of Yahweh. Part of a dissertation submitted to the faculty of the graduate divinity school, in candidacy for the degree of doctor of philosophy (Department of old testament literature and interpretation) by John M. P. Smith

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Cover @ 2017

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The University of Chicago Press
1901

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THIS DISSERTATION
WAS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY AND ACCEPTED
IN JUNE, 1899

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[Reprinted from the *American Journal of Theology*, Vol. V, pp. 505-33]

THE DAY OF YAHWEH.

THE origin of the idea of the Day of Yahweh must be sought in the pre-prophetic stage of Israel's history. The first appearance of the conception in the Old Testament is in the prophecy of Amos, where it is clearly defined and formulated. The idea which Amos found already existing and occupying a large place in the thought of the people was apparently a conception of the day as a time when a period of great glory and prosperity was to be inaugurated for Israel. Naturally such a day was greatly desired. Whence came this idea? It seems to be a development of several ideas in combination. One of these is the conception of a divine mission which early took possession of the consciousness of Israel.¹ Tradition exhibits many traces of such a conception. The founders of the nation and all her great leaders are said to have had in mind a unique position for Israel among the nations. Utterances to this effect are common in the J and E documents,² and, belonging as they do to some of the earliest of Israel's historical records, it is not probable that they are wholly without basis in facts. They may, therefore, be properly taken as evidence for the existence in very early times of a hope for a glorious future of the nation as Yahweh's representative in the world.

In further support of the existence of some such ambition as this may be urged the presence of similar hopes among Semitic peoples in general.³ The national character of Semitic gods seems best explained on the supposition that small and weak families, clans, and tribes submitted to the dominion of larger and more powerful communities because of some necessity, such as conquest, lack of food, or need of protection and assistance against powerful enemies. In such a union the superiority of the god of the more powerful body of people was acknowledged, and the god of the weaker people was reduced to subordinate rank. As this process continued, a nation gradually came into existence, and the original tribal god developed into a national god.⁴ But the fact of his having reached this dignity did not rob him

¹ Cf. FRANTS BUEHL, *American Journal of Theology*, Vol. II, p. 767.

² *E. g.*, Gen. 12:2 ff.; 18:18 ff.; 27:29; 28:14; Exod. 19:5 f.; 34:10; Numb. 23:9; 24:9, 17.

³ W. R. SMITH, *The Religion of the Semites*, 2d ed., pp. 75-81.

⁴ So MENZIES, *History of Religion*, pp. 79 ff.; D'ALVIELLA, *Idea of God*, pp. 20 ff., *et al.*

of his original expansive force; his nature remained essentially the same, and his ambition for power would carry him on to universal dominion, were his adherents sturdy and aggressive enough to attain that goal. It was therefore the natural and proper desire of every Semitic nation to extend the influence of its own particular god to the farthest possible limit. This could best be accomplished through the conquest of new territory over which the sway of the god might be established. Hence wars of conquest, which were at the same time religious wars, were of unceasing occurrence.

Assyrian records furnish the best illustrations of this spirit of expansion in political and religious affairs. The wars of Assyria were preëminently religious wars. Every king in every campaign declares himself to have been incited, emboldened, and prospered by his nation's gods. Kings felt and declared themselves to be the agents of the gods, and regarded it as one of their chief duties to widen the dominion of the gods and to manifest their power.⁵ Esarhaddon, for example, well expresses the animating spirit of Assyrian warfare thus: "The names of the great gods they invoked together and trusted to their power. I, however, trusted in Ashur, my lord, and like a bird out of the mountains I captured him and cut off his head. *In order to exhibit the might of Ashur, my lord, before the eyes of the peoples, I hung the heads of Sanduarri and Abdimilkuti upon the necks of their great men.*"⁶ The inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I., Shalmaneser II., Tiglath-pileser III., Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, and others are full of illustrations showing the place and influence of religious ideas in connection with the national territorial development.⁷ The evident desire was that Ashur should be acknowledged as the supreme deity throughout the known world. The kings certainly regarded him as such and commonly spoke of themselves as kings of the four quarters of the world over which Ashur had given them dominion.⁸

The amazingly rapid spread of the religion of Mohammed is another illustration of the efficient service rendered by religious ideals

⁵ Cf. McCURDY, *History, Prophecy and the Monuments*, Vol. I, pp. 63 f.; SAYCE, *Early Israel and the Surrounding Nations*, pp. 248 f.

⁶ The Six-Sided Prism, *Cylinder A*, col. i, ll. 43 ff.

⁷ Cf. Sennacherib, *Taylor-Prism*, col. i, ll. 10 ff., 63; i, 42 f.; iii, 42; iv, 43; Esarhaddon, *Cylinder A*, col. ii, l. 45; iii, 7-12, 40-48, 53; iv, 19-25, 38-47; Ashurbanipal, *Annals*, col. iv, l. 34; viii, 8 ff.; ix, 112 ff.; etc.

⁸ For the same idea see the closing tablet of the Dibbara Legend, translated by JASTROW in *Religion of Babylon and Assyria*, p. 535, and by W. MUSS-ARNOLT in R. F. HARPER's *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature* ("The World's Great Books," Aldine edition; New York: D. Appleton, 1901), p. 314.

in the furtherance of political development. The religious and ethical principles upheld by Mohammed were certainly purer and more vigorous than those of the earlier Arabic religions opposed by him, and his success was, no doubt, largely due to this fact; but it seems probable that the old Semitic idea of a national god upon whose people there rested an obligation to extend his dominion had much to do in arousing the extraordinary zeal and energy with which the new religion was propagated, and that chiefly by force of arms. For such a religion and such a god success was the best recommendation; a recital of the triumphs already achieved was one of the best arguments for inducing still other peoples to acknowledge the supremacy of the new religion and the new god. Moreover, confidence engendered by successes already won carried the victors on to fresh contests and victories for their god.

In view of such corroborating testimony from without, it is not strange to find evidence within Israel of a similar laudable ambition for Yahweh and of a hope for the time when he would bring great glory to his people. That this hope originated at a very early date is evident, since it appears strongly in the earliest literature. Moreover, as suggested by Professor McCurdy,⁹ the possession of such a hope is a necessary presupposition to any satisfactory explanation of the fact that Israel was able to obtain and hold for herself a home among the tribes of Canaan, poorly disciplined as she was and beset by foes on every side. Her strong faith in Yahweh's power and in his purpose to bring glory to himself through Israel gave her courage in the face of all sorts of dangers and difficulties. Hence it is that every forward step during the period of the conquest and the years immediately following seems to have been preceded and accompanied by a great revival of zeal for Yahweh. Furthermore, the course of Israel's early national history was not unfavorable to the growth of this idea of a glorious destiny. Beginning with Saul and continuing through the days of Solomon, victory and prosperity had come to Israel in no small measure. Even in later centuries the reign of David was looked back upon longingly as a sort of golden age, and ideals of the future were shaped in accordance with the glorified and magnified traditions of the Davidic days. Solomon extended his influence so far, established his kingdom so securely, and equipped himself so splendidly as to be the source of envy and wonder to all surrounding peoples. He was in a fair way to make Israel a world-empire such as Assyria and Babylon later came to be.

⁹*Op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 110 f.

After the check consequent upon the division of the kingdom, northern Israel, under the able leadership of the house of Omri, gradually reasserted herself. This new development was retarded by the long war with Syria, but by the time of Jeroboam II. Damascus was subdued, and Israel had attained prosperity and power second only to those enjoyed during the age of David and Solomon. History thus seemed to justify the popular hope of a gloriously bright future."

In addition to this, the work of the earliest prophets tended in the same direction. All the prophets up to the time of Amos, with the possible exception of Elijah, seem to have foretold success and glory for their people." They constantly emphasized the fact that Israel was Yahweh's people, and that, if Israel remained faithful to him, he would and must lead her on to victory.

Thus far we have found the hope of a great future for the nation through Yahweh's help to have been (1) fostered by tradition; (2) an outgrowth of the general Semitic conception of a God-given commission to enlarge the sphere of the divine authority; (3) a prerequisite as a source of inspiration and courage in the great work of the conquest of Canaan; (4) developed and strengthened by its apparent partial realization in the progress of the nation's history; and (5) enforced impressively upon the national consciousness by the nation's prophets, the spokesmen of Yahweh, the nation's God. In view of these facts the existence of such a conception of Israel's national destiny in the eighth century B. C. seems certain. It was not a conception of an exalted ethical and religious content, for ethical and religious standards were as yet comparatively low. It was rather the conception of a mission, one of the chief ends of which was to bring glory to those who fulfilled it.

A second and important element in the formation of the early idea of the Day of Yahweh was the conception of Yahweh which then prevailed." The people were not far removed from polytheism, as is shown, among other things, by the frequency and ease with which in after years they took up with idolatrous rites; by the survival of the plural form אֱלֹהִים ; by the use of *seraphim*; by the incident of the calf-worship at Sinai; and by traces lingering in many words and customs."¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. G. A. SMITH, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. I, pp. 49 f.

¹¹ Cf. 1 Kings 20: 13, 28; 22: 6, 11, 12; 2 Kings 2: 13-19; 13: 14-19; 14: 25.

¹² Cf. R. H. CHARLES, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel in Judaism and in Christianity*, pp. 85 f.

¹³ Cf. BAUDISSIN, *Studien zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte*, Heft I, pp. 55-65.

The intermediate stage, monolatry, was essential as a stepping-stone to monotheism, and the religion of Israel in the eighth century was of this kind. Israel's God was only one among many gods; the name Yahweh as a proper name distinguished him from Chemosh, god of Moab, Milcom of Ammon, Baal of Phœnicia, and the gods of other surrounding peoples. This monolatrous worship persisted far into the prophetic period, monotheism not being fully accepted and established in the thought of the nation until the days of the exile.¹⁹ The difference between Yahweh and other gods was but dimly realized in the early days of Yahwism. The points of resemblance between the worship of Israel and that of Canaan were more noticeable than the points of difference, and the constant endeavor of Israel's religious leaders was to keep the people from taking over so much of Baal-worship into the Yahweh-worship as to destroy the distinctive character of the latter. The preservation of true Yahweh-worship was essential to the development and continuance of national life and individuality. The Yahweh-religion was almost the only unifying influence which held together the heterogeneous and widely scattered elements of Israel. Yahweh's especial function was to be the deliverer of Israel in time of danger. He was emphatically a war-god, and it was as such that he was honored by Israel. He had proven his superiority to the gods of Egypt at the time of the exodus; and again, in the attack upon Canaan, he had demonstrated his superiority to the Canaanitish Baalim by conquering them and their people. This was, indeed, the only kind of superiority that Israel was as yet prepared to appreciate. Her existence during the greater part of the pre-prophetic period was one constant struggle to maintain her place against the peoples of Canaan, and a god who could not, or would not, render efficient service in this contest was not likely to command her respect and adherence. The victories of Israel over her enemies were necessary, not only to her national existence, but also to her retention of the Yahweh-religion. The work of Elijah in his fearless opposition to Baal-worship, and the work of Elisha as the source of the inspiration, wisdom, and patriotism in the conduct of the war with Damascus which enabled Israel to achieve final victory, sealed Israel to Yahweh in closest allegiance.

¹⁹ See Judg. 6: 31; 9: 13; 11: 24; Gen. 28: 20 f.; Exod. 15: 11; 18: 11; 1 Sam. 26: 19; 28: 13; Amos 9: 7; Ezek. 8: 12; 9: 9; etc. For a fuller treatment of the matter consult SKEND, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (2d ed.), pp. 193-200; MONTEFIORE, *Religion of the Ancient Hebrews* (= "The Hibbert Lectures," 1892), pp. 228, 268 f.; MCCURDY, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 370 f.; W. R. SMITH, *The Prophets of Israel* (new edition), pp. 59 ff.; SCHULTZ, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 175 f.; BUDDÉ, *Religion of Israel to the Exile*, pp. 216 f.