



Zephaniah Wk. 4
The Day of Darkness
By Pastor Jody May 05/24/2026

[CALL TO HEAR]

- ¹⁴ The **great day of the LORD** is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
the mighty man cries aloud there.
- ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
- ¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
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Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”
People – “Thanks be to God.”

Pray

Almighty and most holy God, we thank You for the reading of Your Word. We confess that Your judgments are true and righteous altogether, and that Your Word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. As we now come under the preaching of this text, grant us sober minds, tender consciences, and humble hearts. Strip away complacency, silence every worldly distraction, and give us grace to hear what Your Spirit says. Where we are proud, humble us. Where we are careless, awaken us. Where we are fearful, drive us to Christ. Cause us not merely to hear Your warnings, but to heed them; not merely to admire Your truth, but to obey it. And as Your Day hastens near, teach us to live watchfully, repentantly, and hopefully, resting in the righteousness of Christ alone. We ask this in His mighty name. Amen.

Illustration.

When I was small child, I admit like many of you I don't have a lot of memories but what I do have has stuck with me through the years. I grew up on NW 96



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St. Miami, Fl. and I remember like some of my early b-day parties, playing in the sprinklers, getting my first bike and riding all day long listening to Billy Joel on my coveted bike radio. Those were the days where the street was your playground and you played on purpose barefoot to toughen up your feet, yes, we drank from the hose, and everyone knew how to jump a chain link fence and run from the neighbor's dogs. But not all my memories were great. I also have a dark memory; I remember being deftly afraid of the dark.

I remember being scared to death in my room when the lights went out at night. Picture the scene it is Miami in the 1970s, I didn't have air-conditioning, but by the grace of my parents I did have a fan in my room. Even then after mom would tuck me in, and we would say our prayers, I would pull those covers up over my head, sweating to death, and wait for sleep to take me. I remember my nightmares still in that room, I remember running out of my room in the night in fear of what was in the dark, I remember I did not sleep any better until my mother found for me an article on how to confront your fears in your dreams. **That was the beginning of a lesson that fear only goes away when you take the time to confront them.**

It was not until later in life did I appreciate the darkness for it took a while for me to get over that fear. You see growing up in Miami every street is lit, every corner is bright, that is because Miami was very crime ridden in those days. You learned as a young man if it was dark, you did not go there, for it may have serious consequences. That also means any absence of man-made light made everything seem dark and foreboding.

That changed the summer I was 19 and I went on a youth missions' trip to Wyoming. What I encountered out there was what the world is really like when it is devoid of all man-made light. In the darkness of the Wyoming night was the first time I ever saw a star filled sky, like it was right out of a screen in Star Wars. I could see the band of the Milky Way stretch out before me reassuring me that in the darkness there was a bigger presence than my fears it was the presence of a mighty God. **Man-made light can only pretend to hold back darkness and fear, but the enveloping darkness of God can bring peace.** That assurance helped me later in life fight those fears and in life choose to walk into darkness instead of to be afraid of it.



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Introduction

I want to say though there is a darkness to be truly afraid of. It is the same darkness that brings comfort to God's people, and at the same time the presence of this darkness strikes fear in all the rebellious inhabitants of this world. This passage today will reveal what lies in the darkness of **The Day of the Lord** and what it brings and who it is that needs to fear it.

Amos 5: 18-20 ESV

Let Justice Roll Down

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why would you have the day of the Lord?

It is **darkness**, and not light,

¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,
or went into the house and leaned
his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

²⁰ Is not the **day of the Lord darkness**, and not light,
and gloom with no brightness in
it?

This Day of the Lord does not give the ability for one to hide. People think they can hide from the Lord in **Darkness**, but it is in gloom where they will discover that justice will be doled out! This is not the darkness where the unrighteous go to hide, when the Day of the Lord comes there is no safe refuge. And why is that?

Psalms 97:2 ESV

Clouds and thick **darkness** are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Justice and Righteousness is what lies in the dark for those that will try and hide in it when that day comes, just like the waiting bear or the serpent that bites when the person seeks escape (Amos 5:19). What then is anyone to do?

Isaiah 50:10 ESV



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Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in **darkness** and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

The only choice that any one has is repent and turn back towards GOD! It is the only thing you can do, and the good news is it is not too late for anyone in this room. Believe in the Lord, His power to save, escape this day of wrath, and know His peace! For those that know the Lord, who heed His warnings, and have been brought into the Covenant of Grace by Faith, there is nothing to fear in the Darkness of the Day of the Lord.

This part of the chapter I believe is pointing to a Theophany that is common in the OT, as seen in the former mentioned prophetic references, as well I believe you see it in the NT. A **Theophany**, for those of you not familiar with that word, means simply, **how the invisible God reveals Himself visibly to His people and the world.**

There are these manifestations of God in creation and the main manner that we see in the Bible of this is when He shows up as a deep, dark, and ominous cloud. It is something Israel remembers from their past, it is something that caused them fear even when Moses was with them, and it is the same thing that causes the mighty man to cry out in fear (14). The moving in of the gloom and the dark is the ominous marching of our God towards those He will now direct His wrath towards. That is the day, and that day is coming fast, and the imminent thing about this day there is no way to stop this storm!

MP

As the Day Hastens
Refuge in Christ Becomes Urgent.

We want to build out this MP using what we see in these verses three different ways. First is we want to **live watchfully as the Day Hastens**. That is be aware of the time drawing near, that keeps you in line with being concerned about things of first importance, the lives of those around you. Second, **live repentantly as the Day Intensifies**. We will notice in the text the effects of this Day and what it has for the world, which calls us to mind the



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need to keep repenting of our own sins, lest we fall into darkness. Lastly, we **live hopefully as the Dark Day becomes light**, without giving away too much you will see that for God's people this is not a day you have to fear this is not a darkness to resent.

1. Live Watchfully as the Day Hastens.

^{14a} The **great day of the LORD** is near,
near and **hastening fast**;

As we head towards the end of the chapter we are heading towards a crescendo, a peak if you will. Reference to the **Day of the Lord**, has happened 15 times in Chapter 1 and now in these two verses alone that day was mentioned 9 of the 15 times. The beating of the drums has sped up, you Gen Xers in here this is from our day of music where we have reached the guitar solo, if you will, it is the repeating of a melody done by a screaming guitar, taking the song in play to that next level!

Why is this day of judgment intensifying, why is it speeding up?

Deuteronomy 29:18-20 ESV

Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit,
¹⁹ one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. ²⁰ The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will **smoke** against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.

The **Dark Day of the Lord** is seen as '**hastening**' by Zephaniah, because he has already seen the 10 northern tribes wiped out, he has seen King Hezekiah welcome Babylon into the treasuries to show them all they have, he knows what Isaiah told Hezekiah, *your sons will fall and will be taken away*, ([Is 39:5-8](#)), he sees the pattern, he knows the crescendo is coming, and because it was written of in Deuteronomy that makes it a Covenant Promise. God said when you become complacent in your sin, I will '**smoke**' against that man, it is the dark cloud of wrath. That is the same word for smoke used in [Exodus 19:18](#)



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for the cloud that surrounded Mt. Sinai at the giving of the covenant.¹ The same darkness that surrounded the mountain, caused the fear of the people, but it also gave the people a covenant to preserve them. That same cloud will come with haste when the complacency of the people have become full.

Family we are living in a day that judgment can come any time it's not an **'if'** it is a **'when'** and here is how the Apostle Peter said we should be forever **watchful** because of it.

2 Peter 3:9-10

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰But the **day of the Lord** will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

The Day of the Lord comes without warning, **because for us we live in Grace**. The Covenant we live under is not based in whether we behave or not, the Lord fulfilled our obligations unlike ancient Israel. We do not live under the conditions of Deuteronomy 29, of which we all say "Amen"!

No, Jesus' return is based on something we cannot see - it is so that none of His elect are left out. That's what makes this imminent, foreboding, and gives a sense that we are moving quickly towards an end. **There is a number and the countdown is shrinking**, so we are to live watchfully for that day hastens. We look to see where God is moving in our homes, in our communities, and in our mission work and we move towards that knowing there is a day coming and there are people yet to be saved. Let us live with the sense that it **matters what we do today**, for there is a **limited number of tomorrows**.

¹ וְעָשָׂן S^{6227, 6228} TWOT^{1712a} GK^{6940, 6941} **n.m.** Ex 19:18 **smoke**;—abs. עָשָׂן Ju 20:38 +, cstr. עָשָׂן Jos 8:20, 21; עָשָׂן Ex 19:18; sf. עָשָׂנוּ Ex 19:18; עָשָׂנָה Is 34:10;— **1. a.** of burning city Jos 8:20, 21; Ju 20:38, 40, cf. Na 2:14; heralding a foe Is 14:31. **b.** in fig. of destruction of Isr. Is 9:17, Edom 34:10. **c.** sim. of dust-cloud Ct 3:6; of transitoriness Ho 13:3 Is 51:6 פֶּשַׁח 37:20 (reading בָּעֵי, as טֶשֶׁח), 68:3; 102:4; sim. of the unpleasant, Pr 10:26. **d.** breath of crocodile Jb 41:12. **2. a.** attending theoph., עָשָׂן Gn 15:17; of mt. Ex 19:18, cf. sim. עָשָׂן הַבְּרָשָׁן 18; Is 6:4, also 4:5 Jo 3:3. **b.** of God's anger, בָּעֵי S 22:9 = פֶּשַׁח 18:9; so prob. also Is 65:5.



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Let me leave you with this last thought on this point. If perhaps like me you find the state of this world deteriorating, scary, and evil, **in need of a Savior**, then I would offer to you the best thing you could do is get your head in the game. The Lord is slow to move out of love for His people who are yet to be found, if you want to help the state of the world you pour your heart into mission work, you give yourself to ministry, you invest in evangelism. Hiding from this world because it is scary is only prolonging the inevitable. If you want to help end some suffering, then consider doing your part in bringing the Gospel to others.

2. Live Repentantly as the Day Intensifies.

The Day begins to intensify, as we said we are hitting the high point of this chapter. We started with a far-off universal look, we narrowed in on the specific covenant breakers, and then it begins to strengthen. What we find here that tells you this, is that Zeph provides sensations, or words that convey what you will feel, and he does this by what you will **see** and what you will **hear**. He's bringing the reader into what this will really be like. It is one thing to say it will be bad and it is another thing to describe what makes it bad. **(The Fair Haunted House)**

The description starts off with what you hear and then it ends with what you hear.

14b ...the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
the mighty man cries aloud there.

16 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

Hearing is the sense that tells you something is coming and based upon its' loudness, that it has arrived. The sound is **bitter**, (14) that is you really don't want to hear it, it's the bad news that you know really exists, when you hear it, it stirs your heart to stress (Dr. reports). It was like when I was a kid, and I was not ready yet, and I heard the air brakes on the bus coming down the street!



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character is never conceding, God is always the same (NT example of Transfiguration).

To add to this reality, you also must realize, most of us have never seen war let alone a dead person not in a coffin. But for Zeph's readers death was an everyday occurrence for these people. Not only that, but there were also survivors and refugees from the Northern Kingdom, family members, that told of the horrors of what had happened in their capital of Samaria; what they saw and what they heard. This is all surreal, what has happened will happen again.

This is where I want to point again to Peter's words and his warnings for those last days. For I want us to take heed better than our ancient forefathers.

2 Peter 3:3-4 ESV

³knowing this first of all, that **scoffers** will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

Family this is why we need to keep in mind our sense of repentance. It is so easily to put away the warnings of God, not to say anything to anyone, for we are very easily shushed by this world. People will scoff/mock you about the topics of divine judgment, yet they love to make [movies](#) about it don't they!? You see that is the curse of this world, they can't run from the truth, they create stories of judgment because of their perceived sense of deserved wrath, and yet they will tell you there is no such thing.

We live by continually turning our minds towards the reality that time is short, and we are hastening towards that day. We live by realizing people will try to turn us away from telling the truth of God's judgment. We live by repenting of our procrastination and complacency for not taking seriously God's warnings. We stop putting off the sin we need to confess in our lives thinking we have another day to use for our leisure.



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Family, the world will not agree with you about this coming day but never let that stop you from believing in, prepping for, and acting in light of the knowledge that the Day of the Lord that will come like a thief in the night. Prepare your homes and prepare your families with the truth. Love your neighbors enough by telling them there is a way to escape if they too will repent and turn to the Lord. And please stop procrastinating about those things that need to be done today, like confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

3. Live Hopefully as the Dark Day becomes Light.

The Day of the Lord, as we see it is a terrifying thing to see and hear, but for God's people it is something to cling to and rejoice in! In v. 16 there was a horn blown

¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

The Day of the trumpet blast for God's people is not the sound of the end but of beginnings. It is the day that the Lord fulfills all His promises, it is the day when He comes to reign, it is the day He takes vengeance on those that sought our destruction, it is the day that all the Psalmists sing about all the time! For us the terrible day of darkness has actually become a saving day of light. That is one of the promises of the OT as it pertains to the Day of the Lord, it is not all gloom and darkness for His people, it is light of liberation for His people!

Isaiah 60:1-3 ESV

The Future Glory of Israel

60 Arise, shine, for your **light** has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
² For behold, **darkness** shall cover the earth,
and **thick darkness** the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.



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³ And nations shall come to your **light**,
and kings to the **brightness** of your rising.

That was Isaiah's prophecy that looked not toward a solemn return to Jerusalem, between 538 – 445 BCE. Neither is this a reference to Israel going back home to Jerusalem after WWII in 1948? Remember, Isaiah is the Gospel of the OT, it is all about the coming of the Messiah, this my friends is about the Incarnation of Christ when He came to gather all nations unto Himself. I wonder if you remember this scene?

Mark 15:33-34 ESV

The Death of Jesus

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

That was the day that the same Darkness that was on MT. Sinai came to the Hill of Golgotha. It was that day the gloom, the thick clouds, the deep darkness descended, but it did not descend on all, but it **descended on Jesus alone**, for the sins of His people. That day the **strong man cried out**, for He felt the whole weight of God's wrath on Himself, that which we deserved, and in return we were rewarded with the dawn of Sunrise on the third day, The LORD arised on us! Do you see it my people!? Darkness did come for us, but it was placed on our King, and in exchange we received Salvation that came from the light of His glorious resurrection! We surely have been blessed above all!

Jesus has brought us now into the Kingdom of Light. We are now new creations in Him. Remember the angels that morning, they were shining bright white, they reflected the glory of Christ. That is how His people look to this world now. We reflect His Kingdom Glory now, we are the city on the hill, and the world is now drawn to our Lord by His presence in us which is His light.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-9 ESV

⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or



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of the darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the **hope of salvation**. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Live in Hope family for your future is not Dark, it is filled with the light of Salvation! No matter how bad this world can get you can never lose that which you did not earn, and what God gives to preserve you, cannot be lost.

[CALL TO OBEY]

1. Obey by repenting today, not later.

Since the Day of the Lord is near and hastening fast, do not postpone confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, or the mortification of sin. Put away complacency. Deal honestly with hidden sin, restore broken relationships, and order your life as one who must give account.

2. Obey by living watchfully and speaking faithfully.

Because judgment is real and Christ is the only refuge, live with gospel urgency. Lead your home in truth, prepare your family with the Word, and love your neighbors enough to warn them and point them to Christ. Do not let the world's scoffing silence your witness.

MP

As the Day Hastens
Refuge in Christ Becomes Urgent.

Charge

Beloved, you have heard the Word of the Lord. Therefore, repent without delay, walk as children of light, and do not grow dull in holy obedience. Order your life, your home, and your witness in the fear of God, looking to Christ alone as your refuge and hope. Amen.

Prayer



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Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank You that You have not left us in darkness but have caused the light of Christ to shine upon us. We praise You that though the Day of the Lord is dreadful for the wicked, for those who are in Christ it is the day of salvation, vindication, and everlasting joy. We ask now that the Word sown among us would bear much fruit. Let none of us leave unchanged. Make the careless earnest, make the fearful steadfast, make the proud lowly, and make the weak strong in Christ. Keep us watchful as we wait for the coming of our Savior and preserve us blameless until that Day. We ask all this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who bore the darkness for us and brought us into the kingdom of light.

And we pray for those among us today who may have scoffed at the idea of judgment when they came in, but the dawning of your truth has lit up their hearts. Please open their eyes and ears to your grace, establish the need for repentance in their conscience, and grant the faith necessary for Salvation found in you alone. Convict them, call them, and let them not rest until they are yours for the time is growing short my Lord. Amen.

Communion

Mark 14:22-25 ESV

Institution of the Lord's Supper

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Today when you eat of the bread remember the life of Jesus which was lived for us. Today we remember that our Lord lived out the commandments of the Covenant of Works, living a righteous life that glorified God rightly. Even while on the cross while He was scoffed/slandered/mockd He turned not His head away from the bitter cup of wrath. All praise to our Savior, who loved God in perfect obedience and who dealt with us in perfect patience.



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Today when you drink the juice remember the cost of our sin displayed by His blood for the new covenant. That day the sky grew dark, judgment was poured out, and the cry of the strong man was heard. That man gave up His life of His own accord for us, He allowed the blood to flow freely, without which we would have no redemption. He bore the reality of what was waiting for us, and by the gift of His blood we were set free from that penalty forever. Thanks be to our Lord for His eternal sacrificial love!

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

* The Congregation will stand

Elder – **“Christians, what do we believe?”** Congregation – recites:

LBCF 1689 Chapter 19. Of the Law of God. Paragraph 5. The Moral Law Is Universal and Eternal

The moral law is eternally binding for all, both justified believers and others. All must obey it. 10 It must be obeyed not only because of the content within it, but also because of the authority of God the Creator, who gave the moral law. 11 Christ in the Gospel does not in any way abolish the obligation to keep the moral law, but rather strengthens it. 12

10. Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8, 10-12

11. James 2:10, 11

12. Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31

[OFFERING+LAST SONG] “My Soul Will Wait”

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, who by His unmerited, all-encompassing Mercy allowed His Son to bear the wrath reserved for us.



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Go in the name of the Son, who delivered us from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of light by His strong arm and unwavering spirit.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that gives us hope for today, lighting up our lives with the joy of Salvation, and who empowers us to share this message of hope with the world!

[FELLOWSHIP CONVERSATIONS]

1. What description of “the day of the LORD” in this passage stands out most to you, and why?

2. How does this text challenge the way we naturally think about God’s judgment?

3. Why do you think Zephaniah repeats “a day of...” so many times?

4. What should this passage produce in us personally: fear, repentance, urgency, hope, or something else?

5. How can our homes and church help one another live soberly and faithfully in light of the Lord’s coming day?



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