

# A Day in the New Testament

## “Day” in the New Testament: Hebrew Language and Greek Language Meanings

If you were to pick up a copy of the Old Testament today in the language it was written in, you would be reading Hebrew with a smaller amount of Aramaic. On the other hand, the New Testament was written in a common form of Greek that was the commercial language of the Roman world.

As is commonly known, the Greek language is a more exact language than the other two. This helps us to better understand the possibility of multiple words for “day” in the New Testament from that of the Old Testament. For example, there are two primary words for “day” (along with two others) in the New Testament. The first, *chronos* is applied to human time. The second, *kairos* refers to God’s time.

In another way, *chronos* is a specific time. We get our word “chronology” from *chronos*. When you read your birth certificate and it says you were born at 3:42 am on June 12, 1976, that’s applying the word *chronos*. If you walk through a graveyard, and are looking at tombstone dates such as: April 17, 1892 to November 3, 1963; you are again reading about *chronos*. You are looking at certain specific times.

On the other hand, suppose you are talking about an event that carried over a long period of time like the German bombing of London, England, during World War II. You might say, “That was a dreadful time for the British people.” In this case, you would use the word *kairos*. You have not identified the duration of time, but rather an unspecified time duration of an extended event.

In other ways, if a future event is referred to as a specific date, you would say, "This year Christmas day will be on Thursday." *Chronos* would be your word choice. But if you are discussing the weather saying we are going to have heavy rains this spring, *kairos* fits that time. We could also say that *chronos* is "quantitative time or minutes, whereas *kairos* denotes qualitative moments.

Beyond these examples, there are other refinements in the word *kairos* that we won't get in to. You can discover other interesting differences between these two words on the Internet. In researching for this section, there was one website (among several) that was very helpful to my own understanding. You may also find it of help to you. Here is an Internet address for your use:

[What Time Is It? | Grace Communion International](#)

## **The Word Day As a Time Already Set In the New Testament**

As we move further into some Scriptures from the New Testament, let's turn to the Old Testament for some help as we did earlier with the Apostle Peter in the New. In a Psalm attributed to Moses, we read the following: *A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.* Psalm 90:4. Whether Moses was the author is not certain nor important. The verse is asserting that God's time and timing is not like human calculations of time: There is a vast gulf between the two.

About the Apostle Peter, you may recall that he said, "*With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.*" Notice that the Psalmist increases the impact by saying that our thousand years can be like three hours of night to God. Again, that is one difference between *chronos* and *kairos*. Time with God is relative while time with us is fixed. In a sense, we *need* to know and be specific. God is not

operating in that dimension. (As an aside, in the New Testament *chronos* is found 54 times and *kairos* 81 times.)

You may be asking, what difference does all this make? Let's find out. Beginning in Matthew's gospel. Jesus was visiting in Capernaum where he had lived for a time as an adult. Many people were being healed, but he told his disciples to get a boat so they could cross the Sea of Galilee to the other side. On their trip, a severe storm abruptly changed the scene. Jesus was awakened from sleep; he stilled the storm and shortly made land in the Gadarenes region. Their landing went like this:

*When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"*  
*Matt 8:28, 29.*

Turning to another passage in Matthew. Jesus is getting ready to enter Jerusalem for one of his last times. He asks his disciples to prepare things for a special event: *On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'*" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. Matt 26:17-19.

In each passage, notice the phrases that are underlined: In both cases, at an earlier time God had identified a definite *future* time. According to human reckoning, those were uncertain times—neither had been identified by a date certain. Thus, the word used in both verses is derived from *kairos*, not *chronos*. In Matthew 8, the demons know at the end of this age,

a time is coming when they will be thrown into torment. Then, in Matthew 26, Jesus is approaching the time of his death and resurrection. In both cases, it is God's time that is in view not mankind's.

The intention for this section is not a lesson in Greek. I have no skills in the Greek language. There is an objective, however. We should understand that in both Old and New Testaments, time can mean far more than a 24 hour daily experience multiplied by how many weeks, months and years you might like. The 24-hour day is a human view. (See Acts 17:26–31; “appointed times in history” and “set a day.”)

As humans, we tend to get caught up with the ticking clock—what time will the mail come; will the plane arrive on time; when will he propose to me; can the car be fixed in time for our vacation? These and a thousand other nagging questions reflect our somewhat necessary focus on the passing of time. God's perspective is different. He wants us to see a larger horizon. He remains at the center of eternity both past and future with no ending in either direction. That's not easily our position because we are not God—even though we might dream about that possibility.

## **The Day of Judgment, Day of God's Wrath, Judgment on the Last Day, the Great Day**

Before returning to the beginnings of time and creation, we should examine one “day” in particular that is spoken of in both Testaments. In the New Testament, this day belongs to the *kairos* category of day. It is God's day in every way. It is a day in which only God will speak because on this day, humankind will be without words or argument.

In an excellent book by Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning writes about this day as the day when only Jesus will speak (page 225). Jesus, he declares, is the one written about in Colossians 1:15: *The Son is the image of the*

*invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.* And on this day, Manning continues, Jesus will be asking for an accounting. He will ask, regardless of status or standing, what we have done with our lives. And we must reply.

The day that Brennan Manning describes is the day spoken of in Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments. Jesus talked about this day in Matthew 11:24 and 12:39. A few years later, the Apostle Paul was writing to Christians in the city of Rome referred to this day as the "Day of Judgment" in Romans 2:5. The Apostle John, the beloved disciple, wrote about this day in I John 4:17 and In Revelation 14:6, 7. And Jude, a half-brother of Jesus, points to this day in Jude 6.

On that day, all of mankind will be speechless. There will be no excuses, no weighing of "good deeds" against the evil we have done. Jesus will be armed with undeniable facts from Divine accounting. From our reading of Scripture, we can refer to this day as the Day of Judgment, the Day of Reckoning, the Great day of God, the day of accounting, the Judgment, the Last Judgment, the Last Day, and perhaps more. No matter what it is called or what anyone says, not one human will be exempt from God's call to respond to Him on that day.

Not only has Jesus and the Apostles of the New Testament talked about this day, there are other numerous references to this day spoken of in various ways across the Old Testament. As indicated above, this is not "our day," a *chronos* day; it is a *kairos* day, God's day by his reckoning. It is not a day by our calculation.

***"I will raise them up at the last day: " Jesus***

The Apostle John, writing in his gospel, quotes Jesus six times where he declares there is a "last day" coming when

people of earth will be raised from the dead to face judgment (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; John 11:24, 12:48).

*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the **last day**. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the **last day**."* [John 6:39-41](#).

This last day will be a time of final accounting for what we have said and done. And while Scripture refers to it as a day, we emphasize that it is not one of our 24-hour-variety days. While this time is already on the horizon even now, we are not told its duration. It is not "how long" it takes that is at issue; it is the finality of our lives and God's evaluation that should grab our attention. It is one of those times, again, that if we get bogged down in arguing about the duration of the word "day", we miss the significance of that day and we have missed the entire meaning.

It certainly appears at this point (supported by other Scripture) that Jesus is making a statement: Just as at the beginning, there will be a reversal of time. He is declaring that "human" time will end as we enter into an eternity of "God Time." There will be a final "day" of human time and God will step in to close off that time and reinsert "His own time" forever.

So at this moment in our thinking we want to return to the beginning of this writing and to the beginning of the Bible—the account of God's creative actions, "*In the beginning God . . . .*" That, of course, is the opening proclamation in the book of Genesis. But our inquiry is not about the cosmology of the universe—it's about the personality of it. Ultimately, we aren't concerned with how and when, but rather about who and why. Who and Why are the "main events" of creation.

God inserted mankind into his world and his time. That world and that time as we know it will end. In order to see how it will end, we will return to the beginning to see where we will end up.

## [Time in the First Three Chapters of the Bible](#)