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“The Day of Doom”

“The Day of Doom,” a poem written by Michael Wigglesworth, was written in 1662 regarding Judgement Day as it “dramatizes the final days of humanity, interweaving passages and phrases from the Bible to create an integrated vision of Christian end-times” (Levine 249-266). Judgement Day is “the final and eternal judgement by God of the people in every nation resulting in the punishment of some and the glorification of others” (White). The Bible tells of God’s actions as he “has set a day in which He purposes to judge the inhabited earth” (*King James Version*, Acts 17:31). Written during the colonial-era, the people of this time had a great influence on the growth and popularity of “The Day of Doom” (Levine 249-250). Judgement Day never strayed far from Wigglesworth’s mind, and according to his diary he possessed “dramatic imagination” in which he could have been mentally ill during the time of his writings (Levine 249-250). “The Day of Doom” was based on its historical context, influenced by the people during the colonial-era, and imaginatively written in result of Wigglesworth’s mental state.

Hullinger states, “The biblical phrase ‘Day of Yahweh,’ occupies a peerless place of importance in both the Old and New Testaments” (69). The Day of Yahweh can also be referred to as Judgement Day, as it possesses various names. According to White, humans were planned to live eternity on earth when God created and placed them there. However, God’s intentions changed after the first humans inhabiting earth, Adam and Eve, rebelled against him and his wishes (White). The Bible states, “The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (*KJV,* Genesis 2:15). The garden of Eden contained “every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” made by God himself (*KJV,* Genesis 2:9). God commanded to Adam that he can eat the fruit from any tree except that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (*KJV,* Genesis 2:16). God warns Adam of the consequences if he shall eat from the forbidden tree, and God states, “the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (*KJV,* Genesis 2:16). Adam and Eve consequently ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, just as God told them not to do (*KJV,* Genesis 3:12-13). God punished Adam and Eve eternally, and “they lost the prospect of eternal life for themselves and brought sin and death to all their descendants” (White). The period of a thousand years prior to Adam and Eve losing eternal life is the countdown to Judgement Day, and humans can redeem eternal life (White). “The doctrine of the Day of Yahweh is not only the most interesting but perhaps also the most important of all the teachings of the Hebrew prophets” (Hulligan 69). As a result, as White states, “Judgement Day helps accomplish God’s original purpose for humans and the earth.”

“The Day of Doom” was written during the colonial-era, and the people of this time were fascinated with Wigglesworth’s poem (Levine 249-250). The colonial-era peoples made a strong influence on the popularization and growing of Wigglesworth’s work, as “roughly one colonist out of twenty in New England seems to have purchased a copy at that time, and many more read the poem or heard it read aloud” (Levine 249). Colonists learned the verses by heart, and some men even found women attractive when saying the poem’s verses as “the Doomsday verses much perfumed her breath” (Levine 250). One reason for “The Day of Doom” becoming so popular and familiar to people all around the world is the subject to Wigglesworth’s poem (Levine 250). Puritans recognized Judgement Day from their previous sermons, and grew fond of the poem’s “vivid picture of hellfire” (Levine 250). Also, the Puritans enjoyed the comfortable guarantee of heaven being a “glorious place! where face to face / Jehovah may be seen” (Levine 250). In “The Day of Doom,” Wigglesworth mentions God providing back to his people eternal life on earth, as God does so “in arms of love” (Levine 250). Colonists of the colonial-era found a love for “The Day of Doom,” and spread its comforting, but frightening, verses around like wildfire (Levine 249-250).

Michael Wigglesworth “saw himself as a man of God who happened to write poetry, not as a poet who happened to believe in God” (Archambeau 89). According to Gustafson, “Wigglesworth let his imagination range far beyond the scriptural words transformed in his work” (249). In his early twenties, Wigglesworth kept a diary full of his “dramatic imagination,” and one could come to conclusion that he was mentally ill (Levine 249). It is in his diary where “he recorded a number of psychological and emotional crises,” and “he was almost paralyzed with anxiety and self-doubt” (Levine 249). Also, Wigglesworth possessed seductive behavior for men, but he does not mention his feelings much in his diary (Levine 249). Wigglesworth worried about many illnesses, one being syphilis, and some disorders he thought he had were even imaginary (Levine 250). Wigglesworth’s constant thoughts regarding Judgement Day were due to his father’s death in 1653 that led him to “follow God with tears and cries until He gave me some hopes of His gracious good will toward me” (Levine 250). However, keeping enough attention to God was a familiar maintenance to all Puritans, so Wigglesworth was not the only person feeling this way (Levine 250). Wigglesworth was a man who wrote an exceedingly popular poem, but it was his dramatic imagination that played a part in his success (Levine 249-250).

In conclusion, Judgement Day is a day that people often wonder and think about. “The Day of Doom” gave its readers an insight on what to expect when that day comes (Levine 249). Its origins date back to Adam and Eve picking and eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and how they lost eternal life on earth (White). The colonists of the colonial-era were Puritans fond of Judgment Day, and aided in the poem’s growth and popularity all around the world (Levine 249-250). Michael Wigglesworth wrote “The Day of Doom” with dramatic imagination due to mental illness, making his poem contain vivid interpretations of Judgment Day (Levine 249-250). Judgment Day “will not only be a day of instruction from God, but also a time for those alive to apply what they learn and enjoy the blessings that results” (White).

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