

# STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class  
Anchorage Grace Church  
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## **SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS: What do the Stars Really Tell Us?**

### **THE DAY OF THE LORD AND COVENANT FULFILLMENT**

#### **1A. Introduction**

- 1b. As we've seen, there is a close relationship between the heavenly bodies and the biblical covenants. This relationship has clear eschatological significance.
- 2b. As one scholar has written, "God has declared the continuance of the sun and the moon as symbols of the continuance of Israel. As long as the sun continues to shine in the day and the moon and the stars in the night Israel will continue as a nation. The earth is not left without a witness on this important point at any moment. While God gave only the rainbow which appears occasionally as a sign of His promise not to bring another universal flood, He chose the sun, moon, and stars as His continuous reminder of His faithfulness to His promises to Israel as a nation. Lest anyone should consider these signs as too temporary, He has added that the new heavens and the new earth shall continue the testimony of His perpetuation of Israel (Isa. 66:22). When the present order of the heavens is interrupted, God has already announced that the eternal order will continue it."<sup>1</sup>
- 3b. What is left to do now is to acknowledge and explain two seemingly contradictory scriptural realities:
  - 1c. The heavenly bodies serve as covenant witnesses and testify to God's reliability. By shining light, they are an ever-present reminder that God remembers his promises and will fulfill them.
  - 2c. The heavenly bodies will at a future time be darkened during a time of universal divine judgment on earth.
- 4b. Does the role of these objects in the Day of Yahweh indicate something about the covenants they confirm?

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, "The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," *BSac* 102, no. 405 (Jan-Mar 1945): 35.

- 5b. This final study suggests that the darkening of the heavenly bodies in the Day of Yahweh has direct implications on the covenants they serve.
- 6b. The OT identifies the Day of Yahweh as the time in which all the as-yet unfulfilled covenant promises find their ultimate realization.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Day of Yahweh involves judgment, salvation, blessing, kingdom, and the universal reign of God—all themes that flow out of covenant promises as well.

## 2A. Covenant Fulfillment in Judgment

It might seem odd at first that judgment would be part of covenant fulfillment. After all, aren't the covenants all about the blessing of God on humanity? But as we will see, judgment is an integral aspect of God's covenant promises, both on Jews and on Gentiles.

### 1b. *Judgment of Gentile Nations*

- 1c. There are several reasons why God will judge the nations in the Day of Yahweh. God will judge the nations because of their pride (Isa 2:12), as well as their wickedness (Isa 13:11).
- 2c. But God will also judge the nations for their mistreatment of the seed of Abraham.
- 3c. Yahweh had promised in the Abrahamic Covenant that "I will bless those who bless you [Abram], and the one who curses you I will curse" (Gen 12:3; cf. 27:29; Num 24:9).
- 4c. God intended, through Abraham and his descendants, to bring blessing to the world. Those who opposed that intent would fall under God's judgment.
- 5c. One author has noted that Obadiah is "a case study of Genesis 12:1-3"<sup>3</sup> in that Edom, the focus of divine wrath, receives retribution on account of their mistreatment of the nation Israel.

**Obadiah 10-11** Because of the violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof. On the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem—you too were as one of them.

- 6c. The prophet then applies this pronouncement to all the nations: "For the day of Yahweh draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head" (Obad 15).

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<sup>2</sup> Irvin A. Busenitz, *Joel and Obadiah*, Mentor Commentary (2003; repr. Geanies House, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

- 7c. Jeremiah promised that when God restores Israel, he would also “punish all their oppressors” (Jer 30:20).
- 8c. Joel announced doom on Egypt and Edom “because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood” (Joel 3:19; cf. 3:21).
- 9c. Zephaniah writes about the arrogant taunts of Moab and Ammon against Israel (Zeph 2:8-9), promising “to deal at the time with all your oppressors (3:19).
- 10c. Zechariah writes, “After glory he has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of his eye” (Zech 2:8).
- 11c. All of these passages indicate that one important facet of the judgment of that day involves God fulfilling his promise to curse Abraham’s antagonists.
- 12c. This is also in keeping with God’s promise in the Deuteronomic Covenant that after God restores Israel for their disobedience and brings them back into the land, “Yahweh your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you” (Deut 30:7). This element of the Deuteronomic Covenant finds its roots in the Abrahamic Covenant.
- 13c. It is curious that astronomical signs appear in tandem with texts discussing God’s judgment of the nations during this time.
  - 1d. Sometimes these references are veiled—couched in theophanic imagery from Sinai (Zeph 1:15).
  - 2d. In other instances, however, astronomical signs feature prominently in connection with God’s judgment of the nations.
  - 3d. Isaiah 13:10 and Joel 3:15 contain roughly identical descriptions of cosmic activity, and both are held together by two common denominators:
    - (1) They describe real events that will be observed globally and their significance will be apparent to all. The pagan nations who utilized the heavenly bodies for divination and idolatry will observe their removal by the true God who brought them into existence. They will be divested of life’s definitive reminder of stability and plunged into absolute darkness. Yet, they will also witness the arrival of the Warrior-God who comes to judge and destroy them (Zech 14:1-7).
    - (2) Both Isaiah and Joel were writing/speaking messages to *Judah*, not to the nations. So while they describe judgments against the nations, they also proclaim a message of hope for their audience—Judah. Thus, the darkness that will appear as judgment to the nations will appear as a signal of hope and salvation to Israel.

2b. *Judgment of Israel*

- 1c. Gentiles are not the only ones who will undergo divine judgment during the Day of Yahweh. Israel itself will experience God's disciplinary judgment.
- 2c. "The events that await Israel on the day of the Lord comport closely to curses and blessings delineated in the Mosaic Covenant, and the sins that prompted the onset of these curses parallel sins condemned therein."<sup>4</sup>
- 3c. In other words, the judgment to come on Israel aligns with the very warnings contained in the Mosaic and Deuteronomic covenants (Lev 26; Deut 28).
- 4c. The covenant curses unfold in five stages of progressing severity intended to produce the nation's repentance and restoration. At the time Israel received the Mosaic Covenant, these curses were only potential. However, the prophets chronicle God's implementation of these curses in response to Israel's continued infidelity, finally resulting in their removal from the land.
- 5c. Yet even though both nations were ultimately dispersed into the nations, even this threat was not fully realized:

The future restoration of Israel is also predicated upon the fulfillment of prophecies concerning a worldwide dispersion. The return from Babylonian Exile does not fulfill those announcements since the people were restored from but one nation, not from among all nations. Leviticus 26:33 and 39 speak of a scattering among "the nations." Are these references generic (merely referring to exile among Gentiles) or, are these references specifying a universal dispersion? Deuteronomy 30:3 and Jer 29:14 make clear that the dispersion is universal.<sup>5</sup>

- 6c. Both the Mosaic and Deuteronomic covenants anticipated a worldwide dispersion of Israel among the nations which was not realized until 70 A.D., only *after* the Mosaic Covenant was abrogated at Calvary.
- 7c. This would indicate that, though Christ has rendered the Mosaic Covenant inoperative, the Deuteronomic curses allow for a future outpouring of God's punitive wrath against his covenant people in preparation for the kingdom's consummation.
- 8c. Thus, the judgment that falls on Israel during this future time is part of the fulfillment of covenant realities. As Wenham has observed, "Many of the

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<sup>4</sup> Greg A. King, "The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah," *BSac* 152, no. 605 (Jan-Mar 1995): 26.

<sup>5</sup> William D. Barrick, "The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26," *MSJ* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 124.

horrifying judgments described in Rev. 6ff find their original setting in the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.”<sup>6</sup>

### 3A. Covenant Fulfillment in Blessing

- 1b. The covenant curses, while certainly punitive to some degree, are primarily aimed at producing humility and repentance resulting in the restoration of Israel (Lev 26:40-42). Thus “the blessing covenanted to them is an eschatological hope that the wrath of God falling upon the nation will function as a purifying, refining fire which will usher them—the remnant of faith—into the covenant blessing.”<sup>7</sup>
- 2b. All of Israel’s experiences throughout her history were designed to produce repentance, including their dispersion among the nations. The Day of Yahweh is the time when God’s discipline of the nation finds ultimate fruition.
- 3b. Although the nation will experience a time of unparalleled distress, “he will be saved from it” (Jer 30:7) and restored to the land (Jer 32:37-41).
- 4b. Israel experienced the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant only partially under the Mosaic Covenant because of their uncircumcised hearts (Lev 26:40; cf. Jer 9:25-26). However, under the enablement of the New Covenant, they will enjoy these blessings permanently in the land.

Category of Blessing	Covenant Text	Abrahamic Covenant Promise	Fulfillment in DOY
Productivity	Lev 26:4–5; Deut 28:4, 11–12	Gen 24:35; 27:28; 30:43	Ezek 34:26–27; 36:34–36, 40; Joel 2:22, 3, 26; Amos 9:13; Zech 10:1
Peace	Lev 26:6	Gen 22:17	Isa 11:6–9; 60:18; Jer 30:10; Ezek 34:13–15, 25; 36:6, 15; 39:26
Power	Lev 26:7–8; Deut 28:1, 3, 7, 13	Gen 22:17	Isa 11:14; 14:2; 60:12; Amos 9:12; Obad 19
Population	Lev 26:9; Deut 28:4, 11	Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6; 22:17	Jer 30:19–20; 33:22; Ezek 36:11, 37–38; 37:26; Joel 3:19; Zech 10:9
Provision	Lev 26:10 Deut 28:5, 8	Gen 24:35; 27:28; 30:43	Jer 31:12; Hos 2:22; Joel 2:19, 24; 13:18; Amos 9:13; Mal 3:10
Presence	Lev 26:11–12; Deut 28:9–10	Gen 17:7, 8	Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:30; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 25–27; Joel 2:27; 3:21; Amos 9:15; Zeph 3:15, 17; Zech 8:8

#### Covenant blessings and their fulfillment in the DOY.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 334.

<sup>7</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Bridgepoint Books, 1993), 149.

- 5b. The Day of Yahweh is the element that ties these prophecies together. While it represents the final outpouring of covenant curses on unrepentant Israel, it also represents the full realization of covenant blessings on repentant Israel following their chastening.
- 6b. With these blessings comes the fulfillment of the remaining covenant promises, for in them the core elements of the Abrahamic Covenant receive expansion and greater focus:
- 1c. The land promises of the Deuteronomic Covenant
  - 2c. The royal and kingdom promises of the Davidic Covenant
  - 3c. The seed and blessing promises of the New Covenant
- 7b. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in the future involves the fulfillment of the remaining covenants as well, and many of the blessings from Leviticus 26:4-12 appear in connection with the fulfillment of the Davidic and New covenants.
- 1c. ***Fulfillment of the New Covenant***
- 1d. There are two key OT texts concerning the New Covenant, and both feature elements of the Abrahamic Covenant promises. In this case, all but one category of blessing appears in these two New Covenant passages, tied together by several unifying elements:

<b>Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant Blessings in the New Covenant</b>		
<b>Abrahamic Covenant Blessing</b>	<b>Key New Covenant Prophetic Texts</b>	
	<b>Jeremiah 31:31–40</b>	<b>Ezekiel 36:24–32</b>
Productivity		X
Peace	X	
Power		
Population	X	X
Provision		X
Presence	X	X

- 2d. The first element tying all of these categories together is the promise of a unique relationship between Yahweh and Israel.
- 1e. The phrase “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” is found numerous times in connection with the New Covenant (Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 27).
  - 2e. This “New Covenant formula” restates the Abrahamic Covenant promise that Israel would be “a people of his own possession out of all the peoples” (Deut 7:6; cf. Lev 26:12).

- 3e. The New Covenant ensures that the intimate relationship intended in the Abrahamic Covenant yet never fully realized under the Mosaic Covenant, finds ultimate fruition in the future kingdom.
- 3d. The second element tying all of these categories together is the remnant theme which appears throughout the OT (Isa 1:24-26; 4:2-6; 10:20-22; 11:11; 37:31-32; Jer 23:3, 31:7; Joel 2:32; Obad 17; etc.)
  - 1e. This theme connects with the themes of judgment and restoration. As King writes, “Inherent in the very concept of remnant is the idea of judgment.... If there is a remnant, then one can be sure that divine judgment has occurred.”<sup>8</sup>
  - 2e. Covenant curses were not designed to annihilate the nation but rather to purge it of evil and unfaithfulness. Those Israelites that remained following this purge, judged because of their failure to keep the old covenant, became “the object of prophecies of a new covenant which look beyond the Mosaic dispensation for the fulfillment of the grant made to the patriarchs.”<sup>9</sup>
  - 3e. In short, the New Covenant assured Israel that the nation, as Abraham’s promised descendants, would continue despite their inability to remain faithful under the Mosaic Covenant framework.
  - 4e. The remnant theme appears repeatedly in the context of the Day of Yahweh. In the following two texts, Yahweh’s name is the common factor. For the former it is a refuge, while for the latter it is the source of consummate covenant relationship:

**Zephaniah 3:12-13** I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of Yahweh. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble.”

**Zechariah 13:8-9** “It will come about in all the land,” declares Yahweh, “that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘Yahweh is my God.’”

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<sup>8</sup> Greg A. King, “The Remnant in Zephaniah,” *BSac* 252, no. 604 (Oct-Dec 1994): 415.

<sup>9</sup> Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 150.

- 5e. Likewise, for Joel calling on Yahweh's name is the means by which the remnant is identified and escapes the final Day of Yahweh. In his account, however, the New Covenant and astronomical signs are prominent features:

**Joel 2:28-32** It will come about after this that I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh calls.

- 6e. The pouring out of the Spirit on God's people is, of course, a principle feature of the New Covenant (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Zech 12:10).
- 7e. But what makes this text unique is that the prophet ties together the outpouring of God's Spirit with astronomical signs, and particularly with imagery derived from the original exodus event (Exod 7:17-27; 9:23-29; 13:21-22; 19:16-18).
- 8e. Just as in Egypt, when Yahweh appeared to deliver Israel from bondage and establish a covenant with them, so here also, in the midst of the Day of Yahweh, Joel depicts God's actions in the same way. God's enemies will receive judgment like the Egyptians, but he will provide deliverance and a New Covenant relationship for those who call on his name.
- 9e. The darkness that accompanies this moment, while certainly signaling judgment to unbelievers, instead signals to believers the arrival of God himself (cf. Zech 14:1-7).
- 10e. Whereas Israel's turbulent past and eventual exile from the land had left their national future in question, the New Covenant promise, held together by the promise of the remnant in consummate relationship with God, was confirmed by the heavenly bodies.
- 11e. The removal of the heavenly bodies on the Day of Yahweh in conjunction with the outpouring of the Spirit on Israel's remnant and the appearance of Yahweh himself to rescue his people suggest that these signs signal more than mere judgment. They mark the end of any need for New Covenant confirmation.



- 12e. While the promise remains outstanding, the sun, moon, and stars continue to witness to the viability of the New Covenant (Jer 31:35-37). But when the promise finds ultimate fulfillment with Israel in the Day of Yahweh, this surety is guaranteed by the very presence of the New Covenant mediator—the Davidic king.

2c. *Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant*

- 1d. The Davidic Covenant in particular forms an intricate connection with Abrahamic Covenant blessings. In it, each category of Abrahamic Covenant blessing finds realization in seven key Davidic Covenant passages:

**Fulfillment of Abrahamic Covenant Blessings in the Davidic Covenant**

Abrahamic Covenant Blessing	Key Davidic Covenant Prophetic Texts						
	Isa 9:3–7	Isaiah 11:1–16	Jer 23:5–8	Jer 30:9–11	Ezek 34:23–31	Ezek 37:24–28	Amos 9:11–15 Zech 14:8–16
Productivity					X		X
Peace	X	X	X	X	X		X
Power	X	X		X			X
Population				X		X	
Provision					X		X
Presence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

- 2d. The unifying element in all these categories is the presence of Yahweh among his people.
- 3d. Yahweh's presence was central to his covenant relationship with Israel, and that does not change in the future kingdom.
- 4d. The prophets picture the kingdom firmly under the rule of a coming Davidic king who will administer justice and righteousness to the people and establish faithfulness, loyal love, and peace (Isa 9:7; 11:4; etc.)
- 5d. But the prophets also present the establishment of the kingdom as a time when Yahweh himself will appear in glory to fight for Israel at their most desperate hour (Zech 14:1-4), defeating his enemies and establishing himself as "king over all the earth" (Zech 14:9). Jerusalem will be the political center of the globe (Zech 14:16; cf. Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1-4) and he will reign from Mt. Zion (Mic 4:7), teaching the nations his ways and judging between them (Isa 2:3-4).
- 6d. The two prophetic pictures are *one and the same*. At the coming of the Davidic king, Yahweh himself comes to rule his people. Indeed, this coming, so say the prophets, is marked by astronomical signs.
- 7d. Zechariah asserts that when God manifests his presence to fight for Jerusalem during Israel's darkest hour, the lights go out!

**Zechariah 14:5-7** Then Yahweh, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with him. In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to Yahweh, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time, there will be light.

- 8d. There are two sides to this depiction.
- 1e. First, Yahweh's appearance results in darkness, a key feature of a divine theophany. On the brink of Israel's doom, the sudden darkness of that day signals the arrival of Israel's Warrior-King. In fact, it could be argued that the darkness of the Day of Yahweh in this text is a direct result of Yahweh's appearing. As Feinberg comments, "The coming of the Messiah to earth cannot but be attended by remarkable changes in the realm of nature."<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Jesus' own words testify to this fact (Mark 13:24-26; cf. Matt 24:29-30; Luke 21:25-27).
  - 2e. Second, Yahweh's appearance results in light. Zechariah describes this day as "unique"—a one-of-a-kind event. It cannot be called "day" because of the absence of solar illumination. As the prophet just explained, "there will be no light." But it will also not be "night" because at evening time, when darkness is normally expected, light will appear. This assertion, coupled with the fact that Yahweh "will be king over all the earth" (Zech 14:9), suggests that this light does not involve the resumption of normal solar activity. Instead, it affirms what the prophets elsewhere ascribe to God's glorious presence: when Yahweh manifests himself in glory, the brilliance of the light is enough to shame the sun and moon so that they withdraw their own light in abeyance to his (Isa 24:23; Hab 3:11).
- 9d. This text affirms what the OT elsewhere asserts about the nature of the kingdom:
- 1e. The coming ruler is not only a scepter but a star (Num 24:17)
  - 2e. His coming will be like the sunrise (Isa 60:1-3)
  - 3e. He will come as "the sun of righteousness...with healing on its wings" (Mal 4:2).
  - 4e. When he rules in Jerusalem, his glory will sufficiently illuminate the world, making the services of sun and moon unnecessary (Isa 60:19-20).

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, "Exegetical Studies in Zechariah," *BSac* 103, no. 410 (Apr 1946): 167.

- 10d. The connection, then, between astronomical signs and the appearance of Yahweh to rule his kingdom in the person of the Davidic king is intricate and intentional.
- 11d. The timing of the event and its close association with the theophanic manifestation of God in Jerusalem suggests that this astronomical activity functions as an indicator of Davidic Covenant fulfillment.
- 12d. Whereas God established the sun and moon as confirmatory witnesses to the covenant (Ps 89:36-37), assuring his people that these promises were binding and operative (Jer 33:19-26), at the arrival of the Davidic ruler in fulfillment of the covenant, not only does his glorious presence render the sun and moon unnecessary for light, but their roles as covenant witnesses become superfluous.