

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?

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above.
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
— Thomas O. Chisholm, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

INTRODUCTION

1A. The Centrality of the Day of Yahweh to OT Eschatology

No serious study of OT eschatology can exclude a discussion of the Day of Yahweh. It is perhaps the key and central aspect of the OT's teaching of future events. This is widely understood by theologians, both in OT and NT studies:

- John Walvoord calls it “the key to understanding the relationship of the rapture to end-time events.”¹
- Richard Mayhue identifies it as “one of the major strands woven throughout the fabric of biblical prophecy.”²
- Johan Ferreira describes it as “one of the most important expressions within Old Testament prophetic literature.”³

1b. The earliest writing prophets (Joel, Amos, and Obadiah) placed the Day of Yahweh at center stage, and subsequent prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah further developed and clarified it for their audiences.

¹ John F. Walvoord, “Forward,” in *The Prophet Joel and the Day of the Lord*, by Walter K. Price (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 9.

² Richard L. Mayhue, “The Prophet’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *GTJ* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 231.

³ John Ferreira, “Cosmological and Biblical Eschatologies: Consonance or Dissonance?” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 4 (Oct 2003): 311.

- 2b. The subject matter accompanying the Day of Yahweh is truly immense in scope.
 - 1c. It describes in theophanic language a future day of divine intervention on earth and the establishment of Yahweh's sovereignty.
 - 2c. It constitutes a reaffirmation of Yahweh's covenant with Israel.
 - 3c. It represents the actualization of Israel's messianic hopes and expectations.
 - 4c. It involves the future consummation of the kingdom of God.

2A. Unexplored Areas of the Day of Yahweh

Even though they recognize how central the Day of Yahweh is to the OT, it is curious that "even worthy scholars have been guilty of ignoring what the Old Testament teaches about the Day of the Lord."⁴

One of the neglected aspects of the Day of Yahweh is those passages which describe *astromical signs*—certain cosmological phenomena that will mark this period of time.

- 1b. There is a lack of scholarly consensus regarding astronomical signs
 - 1b. Scholars debate the *nature* of these signs, offering a wide array of interpretations ranging from hyperbolic, figurative, metaphorical, and literal.
 - 2b. Scholars debate the *purpose* of these signs and what they are supposed to communicate to the reader/observer and how they function in the Day of Yahweh.
- 2b. This lack of consensus is due in part to a general neglect of careful study and detailed research. Commentaries often treat these passages tersely and assumingly simplistic.
- 3b. Many commentators offer no more than a single paragraph in explanation of what these signs mean and how they should be interpreted.
- 4b. Often, it is just assumed that they generically point to the "horror" of the judgment of that time.

3A. The Importance of Studying Astronomical Signs

- 1b. If astronomical signs are part of Scripture, and "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable" (2 Tim 3:16-17), then why are they neglected in careful study?
- 2b. If we already know that the Day of Yahweh is central to OT theology, then why do we neglect the careful study astronomical signs, seeing that they occur frequently in texts pertaining to the Day of Yahweh?

⁴ Walvoord, "Forward," 9.

- 3b. Additionally, the vast majority of scholarship, both past and present, has overlooked the critical relationship between astronomical signs and key OT covenant texts.
- 4b. This study focuses on these critical relationships and what they might mean for OT theology.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1A. The Aim of this Study

We are going to explore how astronomical signs during the Day of Yahweh connect with covenant promises and how they might serve as markers to signal the fulfillment of covenant promises to Israel during that time.

1b. The Heavenly Bodies and the Biblical Covenants

The biblical writers frequently used the heavenly bodies as witnesses to covenant promises. Since their presence could always be counted on, they served as perfect representatives of God's faithfulness to fulfill what he promises.

- 1c. God assured Abraham of the truth of the seed promise of the Abrahamic Covenant by pointing Abraham toward the stars (Gen 15:5).
- 2c. Ethan the Ezrahite emphasized the security of Davidic Covenant by comparing the enduring quality of David's throne to the sun and the faithful testimony of the moon (Ps 89:36-37).
- 3c. Jeremiah assures his readers of Israel's ultimate security as a nation and the security of the Davidic throne by pointing them to the "fixed order of the moon and the stars" (Jer 31:35; 33:35-36).

2b. The Heavenly Bodies and the Day of Yahweh

- 1c. The heavenly bodies seem to operate in exactly the opposite function during the Day of Yahweh. At a future point in time, Yahweh will supernaturally darken the luminaries.
- 2c. How is it that the very objects which, by shining forth light, confirm the perpetuation of covenant promises can one day cease to give their light?
- 3c. What does this communicate about the covenants to which they testify?
 - 1d. Are we to conclude that astronomical signs indicate that Yahweh has violated his covenant promises?
 - 2d. Or, are we to conclude that astronomical signs indicate that Yahweh has fulfilled his covenant promises?

- 4c. This study is designed to show that astronomical signs are actually a cosmic display of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness and loyal love to his people, and mark the establishment of the kingdom according to all that God has promised in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

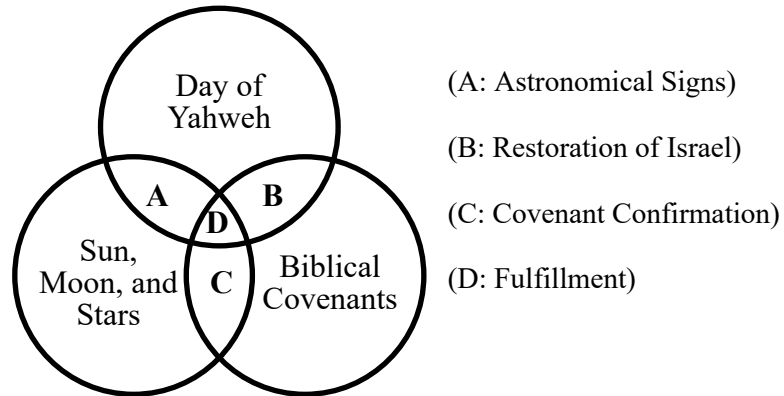


Figure I.0. Interconnections of heavenly bodies, covenants, and the DOY

2A. The Procedure of the Study

We will be looking at several different angles of astronomical signs and trying to answer several pertinent questions.

- 1b. What are the various interpretations of astronomical signs offered by scholars and commentators?
- 2b. What makes astronomical signs difficult to interpret?
- 3b. What are the cultural and theological foundations that undergird their function?
- 4b. How do the heavenly bodies connect to the biblical covenants?
- 5b. How do the heavenly bodies intersect with the covenants in the Day of Yahweh?