

ASTROLOGY AND THE BIBLE

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Astrology — does the Bible condemn it? Certainly that's the idea we get when we listen to today's conservative Christian voices. But is it true? If an astrologer (or a Psychic, for that matter) helps you gain perspective on the lessons you're facing, have you consorted with the devil? Let's let scripture answer.

Open your Bible. Turn to page one. In Genesis 1:14, we read: "And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for *signs*, and for seasons, and for days, and years."

Signs — that's the key word. Right there, not three hundred words into the Bible, we find a reference to astrology. Signs are symbols. Messages. They *signify* something beyond themselves. And if we accept God's word that He has placed signs in the heavens, we have accepted the elemental premise upon which astrology is based: that by watching the sky, we can learn something about ourselves, and about God's will for us.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." That the wise men were astrologers is clear: anyone who observes an astronomical event and *interprets* it is an astrologer. That's what the word means.

The story of the wise men is familiar to everyone. But familiarity is dangerous; it can breed numbness. Although those words from Matthew 2:1-2 are repeated every Christmas, they present a logical problem. Scripture states unequivocally that the wise men were from the east. Thus, to travel to Bethlehem they would need to move west. *Yet they saw Christ's star in the east, and followed it.* How could they go east and still arrive in westerly Bethlehem? Only by journeying all the way around the world. Is there an error here? No — not if we remember that the wise men were astrologers. As any astrologer then or now knows, "east" is the "ascendant" and the most sensitive of all astrological points. What we read in scripture is thus a rather technical astrological statement. The wise men had seen Christ's "star" on the ascendant in a chart they had erected. That's what the words mean, not that there's an error in the text or that the wise men were history's poorest navigators!

Herod, of course, bamboozles the wise men into revealing more specific information about the star. He claims he wants to worship the Christ himself. In Matthew 1:7, we read, "Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared." Why? Of all Herod's possible concerns, why

was the *time* of the star's appearance so critical to him? Once again, we are seeing dim reflections of astrological technicalities. Exact times — of births or of the appearance of stars — are an astrologer's main concern. Without that information, no accurate chart can be erected. Did Herod want knowledge of that moment so that he could consult his own astrologers? That notion is hard to escape.

Thus, in both Genesis and Matthew, we uncover clear references to astrology, even rather technical ones. Interestingly, in neither case do we read exhortations to "believe in astrology" nor injunctions against believing in astrology. Astrology is simply assumed to be valid, a part of the world's nature, like weather or seasons or the sun's rising and setting.

So why are so many Fundamentalists upset about astrology and psychic readings? The passages they generally quote are from the books of Isaiah and Daniel. Let's look at them.

In Isaiah 47, the prophet rails against Babylon for its many sins, among which is an obsession with the occult. "Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of the sorceries, wherein thou hast labored from thy youth...Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee." And in Isaiah 47:10: "For thou has trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me."

What is scripture telling us here? At first glance, we see a vigorous indictment of the "occult." But read closely: "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee." Not "lies." Not "falsehoods." But rather "wisdom and knowledge" — of a kind so awesome that it could pervert people. Is this passage a condemnation of astrology — or is it a condemnation of the uses to which the Babylonians put it?

"None seeth me...I am, and none else beside me." These words are attributed to the Babylonians. Was astrology their problem — or was it the pride and egocentricity, the shutting out of God, that arose in them as they became obsessed with occult power? Isaiah seems to view astrology as a natural phenomenon, like fire or iron, quite real, potentially helpful and also potentially dangerous. To him, astrology was "wisdom and knowledge," albeit of a risky sort. The sin lay with the Babylonians themselves and the uses they made of it.

In Daniel, Chapter Two, we read another story which is often cited as a condemnation of astrology. Is it? Judge for yourself. The Hebrews are in captivity. The king, Nebuchadnezzar, has an ominous dream, which he forgets. "Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams..." They asked him the nature of the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar replied, “The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces...” When they balked, he commanded that his henchman, Arioch, “destroy all the wise men of Babylon.”

At this point, Daniel enters the story. He prays. “Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a night vision.” He tells Nebuchadnezzar the details of his dream and interprets it, praising God “who revealeth the deep and secret things.” But notice: on his way to meet the king, Daniel seeks out Arioch “and said thus to him; destroy not the wise men of Babylon.” And before the king, who obviously was not a man with whom to trifle, Daniel begins his presentation with these words: “The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets...”

For anyone who reads this story with an open mind, it is clear that the prophet Daniel felt no antagonism toward Nebuchadnezzar’s astrologers and psychics. Rather, he made an effort to protect them from the unbalanced king’s wrath. The question Nebuchadnezzar asked was not answerable. As the “Chaldeans” said, “There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king’s matter...there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” Daniel agrees. He tells Nebuchadnezzar, “this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have...but for their sakes...” Thus, a close reading of the story suggests that even God, through Daniel, sought to protect the “magicians, astrologers, and the sorcerers.”

In summary, the Bible invariably presents astrology as real and not intrinsically evil. In Genesis, we find the heart of the matter: “God made the stars for signs.” Later in the Old Testament, we see astrology’s use in the hands of the egocentric Babylonians resoundingly condemned, but we also see Daniel caring enough for Nebuchadnezzar’s astrologers to protect them. In the gospels, we observe Christ’s birth accurately foreseen by devout astrologers — and Herod seeking to twist their astrological knowledge to his own wicked, political ends. Therein lies the message: astrology, like any other tool, can be used or abused. In loving hands, with respect for Spirit, it is a source of “wisdom and knowledge” — both in Biblical days and today. And, in ego’s grip, astrology, like everything else, is darkness.

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