

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Astrology and the Visit of the Wise Men

"Astrology and The Bible" is the title of an article in which John R. Hawkins, a member of the American Federation of Astrologers, undertakes to find evidence that the Bible supports astrology.

The following is an excerpt from his essay:

"One of the most interesting events of all was the birth of Christ: (Matt. 2:1) wise men came from the east to Jerusalem to visit King Herod and to see who was born King of the Jews. Notice in verse 2 they say, 'for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him.' (Num. 24:17) The new translations have this correctly rendered, stating astrologers rather than wise men. Astrology was a well-known science in the East and astrologers were the ones to study the stars in heaven. In verse 7, Herod privately called the astrologers and made a special note as to what time the star appeared. This was very important to Herod's plans. He knew the astrologers came from the East, taking a long time . . . perhaps a few months to 21/2 years . . ."

"Here we find astrologers taking a very prominent position at Christ's birth and later protecting the Great King by not informing Herod as to His whereabouts."

This line of reasoning is designed to leave the impression that the world owes a great debt to astrology. To read this section of Mr. Hawkins' article without turning to Matt. 2 and carefully studying the Biblical record, one might think that astrology prevented King Herod from murdering the Messiah in infancy.

I hasten to point out that we cannot be absolutely certain that the "wise men" who visited the baby Jesus were astrologers. The Greek word *magoi* is rendered "astrologers" by some translators, but such a rendition is not , unanimous. Moffatt translates it "magicians." J. W. McGarvey says the word "designates an order of priests and philosophers." Macknight says the wise men were "heathen philosophers." The Greek word *magos* is translated "sorcerer" in Acts 13:8 and applied to a false prophet.

Even if we grant that the "wise men" were astrologers, the Bible does not indicate that astrology enabled them to locate Jesus, and it certainly was not astrology that prompted them to go home without notifying the wicked Herod of the location of the child who was born King of the Jews.

The star which the wise men saw was no ordinary star. It guided them in the direction of Jerusalem and then seems to have disappeared. When they left Jerusalem for Bethlehem, "lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matt. 2:9,10). This could not have been a star in the sense of a natural luminous body, for such a star would not move before men then stand over a given house so as to clearly distinguish it from other houses in the same village. McGarvey stresses this point: *"A child, looking at a star near the horizon, may imagine that it hangs over a certain house; but when it walks up to that house it finds that the star is as far off as before and is hanging over another house. The star of the magi stood over the house where the child was until they came up and entered the house, thus preventing them from entering the wrong house and finding the wrong child."* Everything in the

text points to a miraculous star - a supernatural light designed to guide the wise men to the supernaturally-born Jesus.

"Evidently we have here another of the many Bible miracles which modern science is unable to explain. Undoubtedly this miraculous appearance, which is called a star, aroused the curiosity of the wise men to such an extent that they followed it for many miles until finally it pointed out the exact place where they wished to go" (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 81).

Granting for argument's sake that the wise men were astrologers, how could they know through astrology that this star signified the birth of the King of the Jews rather than some other important person? If they could learn through the so-called science of astrology that this particular star signified the birth of the King of the Jews, why could they not also learn through the same science that Bethlehem was the place of that birth? Why did they have to ask Herod, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"

It definitely was not astrology that caused them to go home another way. "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" (Matt. 2:12). That was special revelation from God! The fact that God spoke to these men in a dream is not necessarily an endorsement of their character or their pursuits that gave them recognition as "wise men." Note a similar case in Gen. 20:3.

"It is most in harmony with all of the known facts of the history to suppose that when the star appeared a direct revelation was made to the magi which led to all of their subsequent movements. The child was in this revealed to the shepherds of Bethlehem, to Simeon and to Anna; and in this way the magi were instructed not to return to Herod, but to go home by another route" (McGarvey). I must not overlook the cleverly placed reference to Num. 24:17 by Mr. Hawkins. He throws in the reference as if there is no question that the prophecy of Balaam about the "Star out of Jacob" applies to the star which the wise men saw in the east. The Star to arise out of Jacob was Jesus who was the seed of Jacob, not the

miraculous star that led the wise men to Jesus. In Rev. 22:16 Jesus spoke of Himself as "the bright and morning star." This is a figurative use of the word "star" and has nothing whatever to do with astrological predictions.

Whether the wise men who visited the child Jesus were astrologers, or magicians, or philosophers, or kings, there is nothing in Matt. 2 to suggest that we should study the stars to learn about what God expects of us, or that we should begin the day by reading our horoscope in the newspaper to see what is in store. It was God, not the pseudo-science called astrology, that prevented the murder of the Messiah in infancy.

Astrologers want us to think we can know our personal future if we will only consult someone who is in a position to give professional advice. (And the palm readers and fortune tellers say about the same thing.) But the Bible says, "ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (James 4:14).

- Irvin Himmel, Truth Magazine, Dec. 2, 1976

HYPHENATED-CHRISTIANS?

Consider with an open mind: if a person were to be dropped upon our modern world of denominationalism with no previous contact with it, and were to compare it with the Bible, he would see but little resemblance except in the name "Christian;" and that, only in a highly adulterated, hyphenated form.

God's word speaks of no certain kind of Christian — just Christians; nothing more, nothing less. "And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." (Acts 11:26). "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name." (1 Peter 4:16).

Consider honestly: Though sincere and honest, we can never be pleasing in God's sight until we unite on one common platform, the Bible, and work

together to save the world. Jesus prayed to God that we might all be ONE (John 17:20, 21), "that the world might believe that thou didst send me." The reason why there are so many who are "fed up" with religion is because modern "Christianity" is nothing but confusion and division in practice and doctrine. The star of hope on our horizon is the possibility that men will renounce all other names but the name "Christian," and will burn catechisms, church manuals, creeds and confessions, to follow the BIBLE ONLY. (Mark 7:7; 1 Timothy 3:16,17).

- Jim Wilburn

THE MEANING OF OBEDIENCE

Those who question the values of Old Testament study should consider the fact that no place in the word of God defines obedience with greater precision and clarity than the book of Deuteronomy. Special attention should be focused upon three passages: Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2). Ye shall observe to do therefore as Jehovah your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. (Deut. 5:32).

What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it (Deut. 12:32). What is suggested is that obedience requires doing exactly what God commands without modification. Israel was warned against adding to or diminishing from God's commandment, and in the first of the three verses the purpose of such strict adherence to the divine command is assigned — "that — i. e., in order that — ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God." Which is simply to say that the only way to keep the commandments of God is to do exactly as God says, without addition or subtraction. When one adds to or diminishes from the divine commandment, and then fulfills

the modified version, he has not kept the commandment of God at all; he has done as he pleases.

That is a lesson worth remembering. The commandments of God that are in force today are not altogether the same commandments which God gave in an earlier age. But the meaning of obedience does not change, no matter what commandments God gives.

- L.A. Mott, Jr., via *Searching the Scriptures*, Feb., 1973.

- > "Many people have the right aim in life, but most of them don't pull the trigger!"

 - > "No man is rich enough to buy back his past!"

 - > "When you dislike a person, try doing something nice for him!"

 - > "A bicycle rider must keep moving just to keep his balance. The Christian must keep moving toward maturity in Christ if he would keep opposing forces in check!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"What Will You Do With Your Sins?"* (Text: Rom. 3:23); Sunday evening: *"Who Will You Crucify?"* (Gal. 2:20).