

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 16

Volume 16 • Number 4 • October 1992

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

Astrology and Other Methods of Divination

Anthony P. Stone

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The author who is a long-term student of the astrological systems evaluates astrology in the light of modern scientific knowledge and concludes that it is a form of divination. He traces the use of astrology, divination and occult practices in the biblical record and discusses their relationship to demonic powers. In the postscript the author reflects on the ways Christ guides his people.

Editor

When an astrologer is given a problem, such as the prediction of future events, counselling a client, or fitting the life of a well-known person to his/her horoscope, the sequence of steps followed is typically this: (1) a horoscope is drawn up; (2) symbolic meanings for the planets, signs of the zodiac, etc., are called into play; (3) rules of interpretation are considered; (4) an answer is given.

Medieval Europeans thought that astrology was the science of celestial influence, and Indian astrological texts speak of what the planets are thought to do. The notion that astrology deals with celestial influence is very persistent, but false.

I shall argue that astrology is not science, but divination. We shall then look at what the Bible says about divination and related topics, and classify the various passages according to what they actually say. God has forbidden some methods and given us others. Astrology is forbidden both directly and (as divination) indirectly. It is then possible to understand better the place of these things in spiritual warfare.

ASTROLOGY AND DIVINATION IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE

The following points illustrate the fact that astrology is not set up to deal with celestial influence. Not all the planets are used; the three planets discovered in modern times and the minor planets (asteroids) are **P. 399** usually neglected. The nodes of the moon's orbit are treated as planets in some systems. In addition, there are several different systems of unobservable, imaginary planets, both in Western and in Indian astrology.

Usually, not all the stars are considered, but only the signs of the zodiac. Similarly, the 3-dimensional picture of the planetary and stellar positions is not usually considered; only positions in the plane of the zodiac receive attention. Also, the signs of the zodiac have different starting points in different systems, varying by nearly one sign.

Indian astrology contains a number of non-astronomical methods. For instance, some methods of deciding on a birth time, when this is not known, make use of the posture of the enquirer.

If astrology dealt with celestial influence, it would be organized like a science, but we shall see shortly that this is not the case. Before that, we need to look at the meaning of 'divination', which is the technical term for all ways of seeking information not available by ordinary means. The following examples illustrate this:

In ancient India the qualities of a prospective bride might be decided by collecting eight lumps of earth from different places, varying from an exceptionally fertile field to a cremation ground, and the girl being asked to choose one lump. The interpretation was

analogous to the source of the chosen lump. This is a case of *external* divination, because there is no scope for any intuitive modification of the result.

The oracles of the ancient Mediterranean world gave answers to questions while in a trance. Such methods are called *internal* divination. The use of Tarot cards involves both an external component, the cards, and the internal component of the card reader's feelings and intuitive response.¹ This is therefore an example of *mixed* divination.

We may now contrast science with divination, and identify astrology as divination.

1. Science has a direct connection with its subject matter. For example, weather is predicted from observations of weather. Divination from external signs uses symbolic connections (e.g. the lumps of earth from different sources). Astrology also uses a very rich collection of symbolic connections. For instance, certain planetary configurations are considered to indicate various forms of weather.

2. Science rejects theories which are inconsistent with known facts, whereas divination retains all methods. Practitioners of divination often p. 400 use a range of different methods. Astrology contains many inconsistent systems, and we can mention only a few. There are at least fifteen different ways of dividing the zodiac into twelve parts (the twelve 'houses') relative to the horizon of a place. Western astrology has at least five methods and Indian astrology forty-five methods, for predicting the time of future events, and these generally differ. There are also many schools of astrology, which differ widely.²

3. Scientific theories are subject to open discussion, and the rules governing them are the same for everyone. The rules of divination, however, are not explained and diviners use whatever works for them. Astrologers, too, seek success among the various inconsistent methods available. The rules of astrology are not usually explained, unless it is with reference to other, unexplained, astrological principles.

4. Science is restricted to repeatable processes and looks for causal explanations of them. Divination makes use of chance conjunctions of events, and the diviners intuition. The same is true of astrology.

5. Science expects success; astrology and other methods of divination hope for success.

DIVINATION AND OCCULT PRACTICES IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

There are several words for divination and related occult practices in the Old Testament. We shall look at them individually, and also at their linguistic interrelationships.

Divination (*qsm*) is used in a wide range of meanings: divination in a bad sense ([1 Sam. 15:23](#)); words of false prophets claiming to speak from the Lord ([Jer 14:14](#)); but also the words of a king ([Prov. 16:10](#)). In [Ezek. 21:21](#) there is divination by arrows, teraphim, and inspection of livers, and in v. [22](#) 'divination' also means the object indicating 'Jerusalem' in these procedures (ET 'lot').

To show the linguistic usage, each Hebrew and Aramaic root will be translated consistently in what follows. (The context will show whether 'divination' means *qsm* or divination in general.) We cannot hope to give all biblical references to divination, but we shall attempt to list all divinatory occurrences of the ten terms explained here.

Augury (*nchsh*) also has a variety of meanings. It describes Joseph's professed cup divination ([Gen. 44:5, 15](#)) as well as Balaam's activities ([Num. 24:1](#)). In [1 Kg. 20:33](#) it

¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) 129–132.

² For further material see Anthony P. Stone, *Hindu Astrology: Myths, Symbols and Realities* (New Delhi/Pune: Select Books, 1981), and reference 15 below.

means ‘to watch for a sign’. There is also [p. 401](#) a figurative use when Laban says he has ‘augured’ that the Lord blessed him because of Jacob ([Gen. 30–27](#)).

It is not clear what sort of procedure is described as *soothsaying* (*’nn*), so the KJ ‘observing times’ sounds too precise. *Sorcery* (*kshp*) often refers to magical practices, but the sorcerers of [Jer. 27:9](#) are individuals who speak to the people, along with diviners, soothsayers, prophets, and dreamers. At Endor, Saul visited a woman who was ‘mistress of a spirit (*’ob*)’ The term *medium* (*yidd’oni*) is used only in conjunction with spirit, so it refers to a related spiritist practice. *Teraphim* (*terapim*), explained as household gods, were used for divinatory inquiry ([Ezek. 21:21](#); [Zech. 10:2](#)).

Chaldeans (*kašda*) are among the wise men mentioned in Daniel, and were probably astrologers (as in NIV). The word translated ‘astrologers’ in the KJ is *ašap*, an enchanter. The ‘soothsayers’ in the King James translation of Daniel are what we shall call *dividers* (*gazar*). The RSV gives ‘astrologers, and the babylonian dividers (*hbr*) of the heavens ([Isa. 47:13](#)) obviously were astrologers, but this is not absolutely certain in the case of the men mentioned in Daniel.

The Biblical statements about divination and other occult practices fall into three main groups.

First, there are statements which are *neutral*. The practices may simply be described, as in the account of the king of Babylon’s choice between Jerusalem and Ammon ([Ezek. 21:21f](#)). There are also figurative uses of the terminology ([Gen. 30:27](#); [Prov. 16:10](#); [Gal. 3:1](#)).³

The *second* group contains two sets of statements *condemning* divination and other occult practices. The first set is found in the Torah, and given God’s basic condemnation of the occult. The Law given on Sinai included the death penalty for being a sorceress ([Ex. 22:18](#)). The two following verses prescribe the same penalty for bestiality and for sacrificing to another god. This shows the seriousness of these acts.

The further commands recorded in Leviticus give a plain proscription of augury and soothsaying ([Lev. 19:26](#)). The penalty for consulting spirits and mediums is death ([Lev. 20:6, 27](#)), because they are (spiritually) defiling ([Lev. 19:31](#)).

Deuteronomy has a more extended list of practices found in other nations, which are forbidden to the Israelites: fire offering of children, [p. 402](#) divination, soothsaying, augury, sorcery, enchantments (*chbr*), inquiring of spirits and mediums, and inquiring of the dead ([Dt. 18:9–14](#)). Note that [Dt. 18:14](#) uses the pair of terms, ‘soothsayers and diviners’, to stand for all sorts of diviners. It is specifically said that these things are abominable to the Lord (v. [12](#), cf. v. [9](#)). The extensive nature of the list shows that all such things are being forbidden. Astrology therefore comes under the biblical condemnation of divination. It is also clear that God will continue to guide (vv. [15–22](#)).

The statements in the second set are *consequent* on the condemnations of the first set. Samuel speaks of the sin of divination in parallel with ‘iniquity and teraphim’ ([1 Sam. 15:23](#)). Saul had expelled the spirits and mediums from the land ([1 Sam. 28:3](#)), but consulting a spirit was part of his disobedience to the Lord ([1 Chron. 10:13f](#)). The Assyrian captivity is attributed to sins such as fire offering of children, and divination and augury (perhaps again a representative pair of practices; [2 Kg. 17:17](#)).⁴

³ See also [Gen. 44:5, 15](#); [1 Kg. 20:33](#) (augury); [Ex. 7:11](#) (sorcery); [Num. 22:7](#); [Josh. 13:22](#); [1 Sam. 6:2](#); [Isa. 3:2](#); [Mic. 3:11](#) (divination); [Jdg. 9:37](#) (soothsayer); [1 Sam. 28:7–9](#); [Isa. 19:3](#) (spirit, medium); [29:4](#) (spirit); [Hos. 3:4](#) (teraphim); [Dan. 5:11](#) (magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers).

⁴ See also [2 Kg. 21:6](#) (augury, soothsaying, spirit, medium); [2 Ch. 33:6](#) (adds sorcery); [2 Kg. 23:24](#); [Isa. 8:19](#) (spirit, medium); [Isa. 2:6](#); [578:3](#) (soothsayer); [Mic. 5:12](#) (and sorcery); [2 Kg. 9:22](#); [Nah. 3:4](#); [Mal. 3:5](#) (sorcery).

[Jeremiah 10:1–16](#) is most important as it contains an explicit command not to study astrology or take note of astrological predictions. This makes it clear that the prohibitions in the Torah apply also to the specific case of astrological divination.

The basic statement, as a message from the Lord, is in vv. [2–3a](#), and is in inverted parallelism:⁵

Do not learn the way of the nations,
and do not be frightened by the signs in the sky,
although the nations are frightened by them,
³for the customs of the peoples are worthless.

The rest of the passage deals with idolatry, but also links up explicitly with the celestial signs of astrology. Babylonian astrology used both usual and unusual events, for example:

If a north wind blows when the new moon appears, there will be a flood in that month.⁶

These signs were thought to be signs given by the various Babylonian gods. In vv. [10–13](#) it is said that the Lord made the earth [p. 403](#) and it is he who brings earthquakes (v. [10](#)), thunder, clouds, lightning, rain, and wind (v. [13](#)). Now, all of these things are signs in Babylonian astrology.⁷ Hence if we revere God, we have no need to fear these ‘signs’. At Ugarit, too, the Canaanites worshipped the heavenly bodies and interpreted celestial signs.⁸ Hence the fact that v. [13](#) lists effects attributed to Baal⁹ may also have an astrological reference.

Because of the parallelism, v. [3a](#) applies both to idolatry and to the astrological signs in the sky. There is another very important point. In v. [2](#), the Hebrew phrase translated ‘learn the way’ is literally, ‘learn into the way (‘*el-derek*)’. There are only two other places in the Hebrew Bible where the phrase is used in this sort of metaphor: [2 Chron. 6:27](#) (learning God’s way) and [Prov. 7:25a](#) (getting into immoral ways). So it implies serious involvement.¹⁰ Hence, in this passage, God is telling us not to get into the study of astrology, and not to take note of astrologers’ predictions.

The following New Testament incidents may be included in this set. A girl who divined by means of a spirit of ‘python’ was delivered by Paul and lost this ability ([Acts 16:16–19](#)). Converts at Ephesus burned their books of magic ([Acts. 19:19](#)).¹¹

The *third* group of biblical statements shows the *inadequacy* of divination. Balaam says, ‘There is no divination in [(?) regard to] Israel/No augury in [(?) regard to] Jacob’ ([Num. 23:23](#)).

⁵ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); William McKane, *Jeremiah* Vol. 1 (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

⁶ R. C. Thompson, *The reports of the magicians and astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum* (London, 1900) no. 29.

⁷ R. C. Thompson, *op. cit.* nos. 263–267 (earthquakes); nos. 253f, 256–23 (thunder); nos. 87, 139, 248 (clouds); nos. 256f, 259, 262 (lightning); nos. 139, 250–253, 256–260 (rain); no. 68f, 123, 137, 141, 258 (wind).

⁸ John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2nd edn, 1965) 193–4.

⁹ Lawrence Boadt, *Jeremiah 1–25* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982) 87; William L. Holladay, *op. cit.* 335.

¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 327.

¹¹ See also N. T. passages condemning sorcery: [Gal. 5:20](#); [Rev. 9:21](#); [18:23](#); [21:8](#); [22:15](#).

False prophets and diviners, even when claiming to speak for the Lord, are not to be heeded ([Jer. 14:14](#); [29:8](#); [Ezek. 13:1-23](#); [22:28](#); also [Jer. 27:9](#), along with dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers).

Some of the best known passages about astrologers fall into this category., Isaiah chapter [47](#) says that the Babylonian astrologers (v. [13](#)) cannot tell when God's judgment will fall on Babylon, and their sorceries and enchantments cannot ward it off (vv. [9-12](#)).

In Daniel chapter [2](#), the Chaldeans were not able to tell the king what his dream had been ([Dan. 2:2, 4, 5, 10](#)), and Daniel explains that no wise men, enchanters, magicians or dividers would be able to succeed (v. [27](#)) because the dream was from God, who revealed both [p. 404](#) the dream and its meaning to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar then made Daniel chief prefect over the wise men of Babylon (v. [48](#); in [5:11](#) they are enumerated as magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and dividers).¹²

In the book of Esther, Haman had lots cast to select an auspicious day on which to approach the king, so that he would obtain the king's permission to massacre all the Jews in the Persian empire ([Esther 3:7](#)). Through Esther's intercession the Jews were saved and Haman was hanged ([9:24f](#)).¹³

The story of the Magi ([Mt. 2](#)) shows astrologers (v. [1f](#)) being guided by a passage of Scripture (vv. [4-6](#)).¹⁴ Simon the magician changed on his conversion from being a great man to being the most spiritually needy Christian ([Acts 8:9-24](#)). The magician Elymas was made temporarily blind when he opposed Paul's preaching of the gospel ([Acts 13:6-12](#)).

God has, of course, always provided his own methods of guidance. These may be listed as: direct guidance (including the words of Jesus), angels, dreams and visions, signs and wonders, sacred lot, Urim and Thummim, prophets, and Scripture.

THE PRACTICE OF DIVINATION AND DEMONIC POWER

There are two kinds of spiritual reality: the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness ([Col. 1:13](#)), or the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan ([Acts 26:18](#); [Mt. 12:26](#)). God's methods of guidance belong to his kingdom, and since astrology and other forms of divination are not approved by God, they belong to the kingdom of darkness. Consequently, any contact with these practices has its dangers. Their continued study or use leads to deception and can result in demonization of various kinds.

As *deception*, divination leads to wrong attitudes to God. It encourages a self-centred approach to life when it focuses on questions like, 'When will I get promotion?', or 'When will I get married?'. It neglects God when it seeks to control situations, either by occult knowledge (e.g. when to start some venture) or by protection [p. 405](#) from an adverse planet (e.g. through talismans or worship of the planetary deity).

There is an 'esoteric' form of astrology which applies it to personal spiritual advancement, often in connection with a belief in reincarnation and *karma*. However, the philosophy of the perfectibility of the self is quite different from the gospel of Christ.

Divination also leads to wrong attitudes to other people. A person is liable to be stereotyped on the basis of their astrological sun-sign (for instance), both by friends and

¹² See also [Dan. 1:20](#) (magicians, enchanters); [Dan. 2:2](#) (magicians, enchanters, sorcerers with Chaldeans); [4:7](#) (magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers); [5:7](#) (enchanters, Chaldeans, dividers), [15](#) (wise men, enchanters).

¹³ See also [Num. 24:1](#) (augury); [Isa. 44:25](#); [Jer., 29:8](#); [Ezek. 12:24](#); [21:23, 29](#); [Mic. 3:5-7](#) (divination); [Zech. 10:2](#) (adds teraphim).

¹⁴ Further details are given in Anthony P. Stone, *We Have Seen His Star* (New Delhi: TRACI, 1983).

employers. Apart from being statistically unsupported,¹⁵ this attitude denies free will and the grace of God.

The false prophets of ancient Israel were deceptive because they wrongly claimed to be speaking words from God. John advised Christians to beware of false prophets and ‘test the spirits’ ([1 Jn. 4:1](#)). Paul told the Corinthians to ‘weigh carefully’ what Christian prophets said ([1 Cor. 14:29](#)). This is also necessary today. Selwyn Hughes gives a contemporary example:

I was at a meeting in Wales, many years ago, when someone ‘prophesied’, saying things that were absolute rubbish, then tagged on the phrase: ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ The pastor who was in charge, immediately got up and said, ‘Thus saith the Lord? I wouldn’t put my name to that—let alone the Lord’s!’¹⁶

Astrologers like to say that [Jeremiah 10:2](#) establishes that there are signs to be found by astrology, which, however, we should not fear. We have seen that this is not what the passage says.

The *demonic* nature of the spiritist seance is well documented.¹⁷ The spiritist connections of astrology are less well known. Ankerberg and Weldon¹⁸ have given a wealth of examples and references to astrologers who are helped by spirits. They quote the testimonies of three converted astrologers who conclude that spirits provide the power in astrology. Some astrologers, though, do not realize this for a long time, if ever. There are even books of astrology whose human writers testify that they were dictated by spirits. p. 406

It is clear, then, that it is unsafe to become involved in the predictive processes of divination. Study, if done at all, has to be from outside.

Because of spiritual warfare, the burning of books of magic by Christian converts in Ephesus ([Acts 19:19](#)) was not an over-reaction. It has frequently been found necessary today.¹⁹ Here is an example from the writer’s own experience.

The writer bought a particular compendium of Indian astrology for his historical studies. Later, he felt that God was telling him to burn the book because it was an adverse spiritual influence. On hearing that he no longer had the book, a Hindu astrologer commented, ‘That book has many bad things in it’.

The victory of Christ on the cross provides the Christian with all that is necessary to combat Satan’s wiles with divine power. Christ has conquered the powers ([Col. 2:15](#); [1 Pet. 3:21f](#)), and is able to meet any need, whether for wisdom, understanding, guidance, protection or deliverance.

¹⁵ G. Dean, *Recent Advances in Natal Astrology* (Subiaco, W.A.: Analogic, 1977) 75; Michel Guaquelin, *The Truth About Astrology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 129.

¹⁶ Selwyn Hughes, *Every Day With Jesus*, September/October 1991 (Farnham, Surrey: CWR) notes for 29 Oct.

¹⁷ E.g. Kurt E. Koch, *Christian Counselling and Occultism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1965); *Between Christ and Satan* (Grand Rapids: Kregel) [1968]; Victor H. Ernest, / *Talked With Spirits* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1973); J. Stafford Wright, *Christianity and the Occult* (London: Scripture Union, 1971)

¹⁸ John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Astrology: Do the Heavens Rule our Destiny?* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1989).

¹⁹ Kurt E. Koch, *Christian Counselling and Occultism* (op. cit.) 129, 134. *Occult Bondage and Deliverance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981) 90.

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Astrology was my Hobby A Personal Account

Oswald Chakravarty

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BOOKS AND CHARTS

When I was 15 my uncle began to teach me the fundamentals of astrology. After a few months study of books and horoscopes, a friend showed me his hand. Instead of looking at his palm I decided to cast a horoscope for the time at which he questioned me. He was very surprised to find that even without looking at his hand I could tell him many things about his past. I predicted that he would get a job in a factory. He did not believe me—but a few weeks later he came to congratulate me on my accuracy! Such incidents encouraged me to study astrology still further.

Then God made me spiritually alive and for a few months my interest in astrology died down. When I asked some friends whether I should continue to practise it, they said that astrology was scientific and that there was nothing wrong with it, but that it could be used to help people. They could not have been more wrong.

Now I studied astrology from many books. When anyone came to consult me, I used to make a chart for the time of the question and consider all the astrological factors which showed up in it. I would meditate on these factors, keeping the question in mind. Ideas would come into my mind, which I noted down. Suddenly, the answer would be on my tongue.

My predictions sounded strange to me and I wondered how they could possibly take place. But the things I said came true!

By now I was completely absorbed in astrology. Looking for the astrological cause for everything filled my waking hours. Although I did not notice it, the Bible had become a bore and I did not like to pray. The only things which interested me were astrology, palmistry and numerology. Soon Tantra was added to my reading list.

SURPRISES

One day in 1970 my teacher at college showed me his palm and I was able to tell him what he wanted to know. Then he told me that his father was an astrologer, and invited me to his home. P. 408