

Blavatsky and the Great Year: Astrology in the Bible

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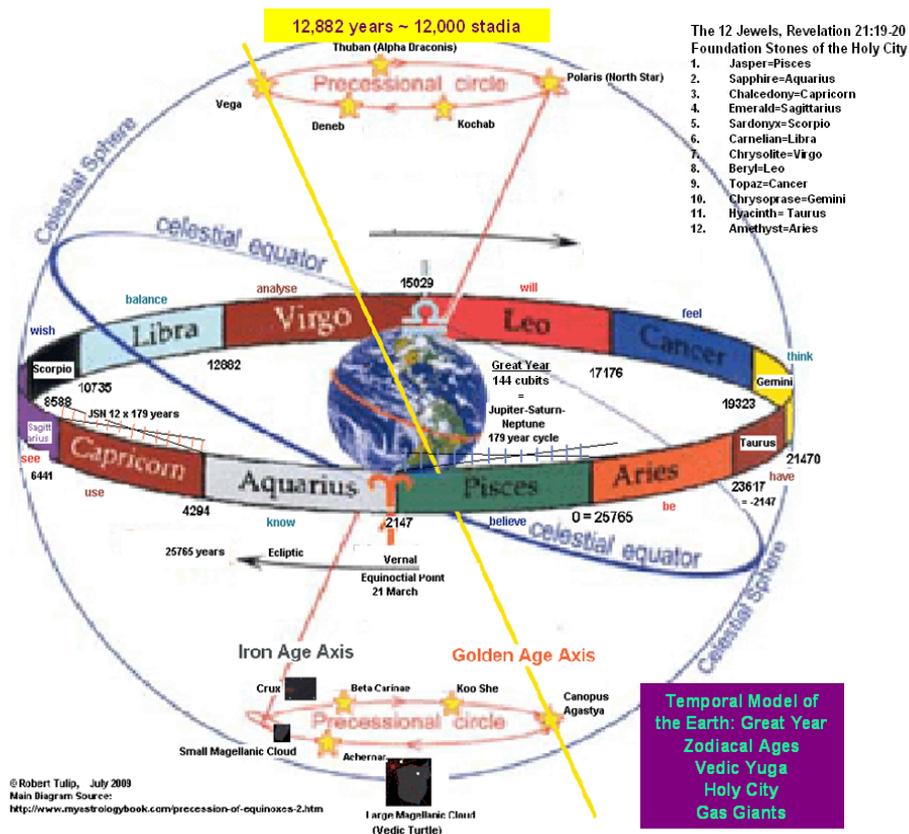
Dedicated to the memory of David Hume, patron saint of Sydney University.

Abstract: The Great Year is the 25,765 year long period of precession of the equinox around the zodiac, caused by the wobble of the axis of the earth. Discussed by Madame Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, and by other modern mystics such as Carl Jung in his book *Aion*, the Great Year provides a unifying cosmic framework for the esoteric wisdom of the perennial philosophy, summarized in the axiom ‘as above so below’. This paper analyses references in the Bible to show how the Great Year underpins Theosophy as a discipline that bridges theology, astrology and science, pointing to a new philosophical synthesis for a New Age.

1. The Great Year

William Butler Yeats, in *A Vision*, said that before embarking on his study of the Great Year of the Ancients he had not imagined that anyone had tried to explain history philosophically. Such a project is precisely what HP Blavatsky attempts in *The Secret Doctrine*. The goal of Blavatsky’s effort is to provide cogent and compelling intellectual foundations for the paradigm shift that our world is now going through, towards an understanding of the Great Year as the true horizon of time.

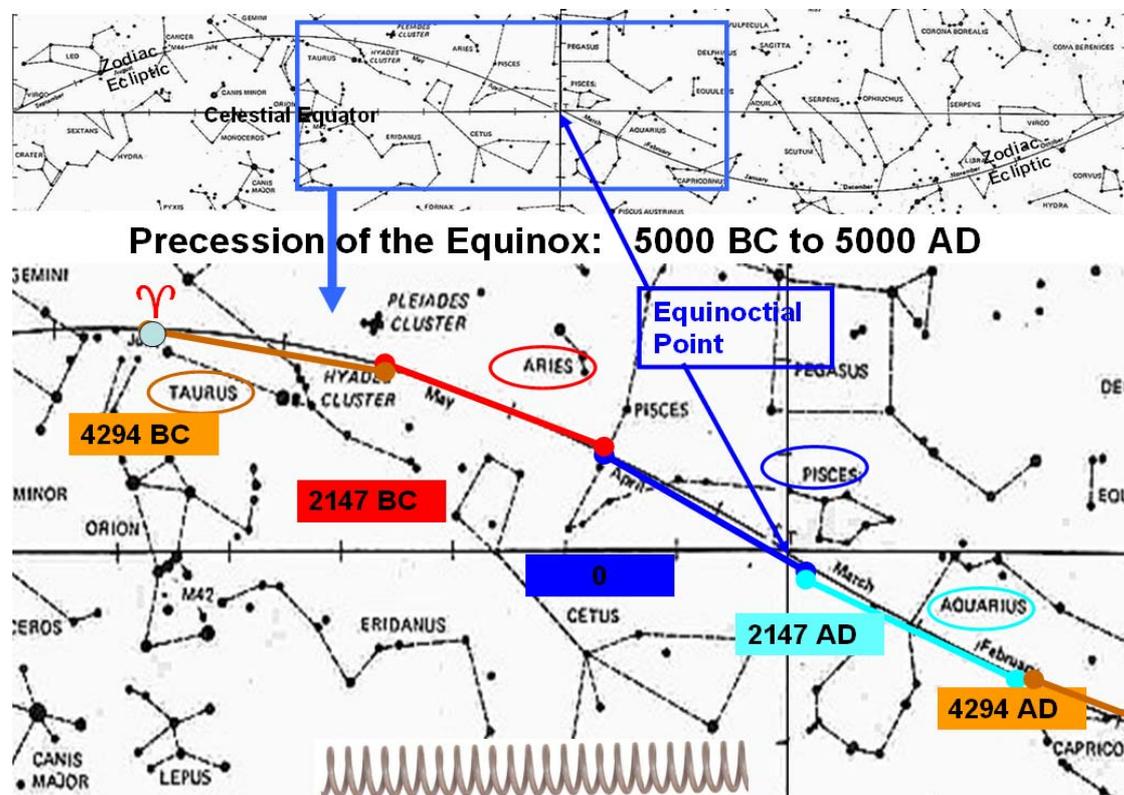
The consequence of this paradigm shift for Biblical studies is to read the Bible as primarily cosmic allegory rather than as literal description of supernatural events. As per TS Kuhn’s theory of the structure of scientific revolutions, the new emerging cosmic paradigm of the Great Year has high explanatory power for the real meaning of religious texts, while the old paradigm of orthodox faith is collapsing beneath its many anomalies.



The earth's axis wobbles with a period of about 25765 years, a stable astronomical cyclic period known as the Great Year. Moving very slowly in reverse along its annual path, the sun precesses in its apparent annual galactic position against the zodiac by one degree of arc every 71.6 years. Over the course of each Great Year, the sun inscribes the precessional circle of the Ages of the Zodiac at the equator as shown in the temporal model above, while the axis of the earth inscribes the precessional circles at the North Celestial Pole and the South Celestial Pole. There have been nearly 200,000 Great Years since the dawn of life on earth four billion years ago.

Traditionally also known as the Platonic Year, this regular movement of the seasons against the stars is caused by the gravitational torque of the sun and moon on the 'spare tyre' around earth's equator, and is the physical basis of the division of time into twelve Ages, including the now ending Age of Pisces and the dawning Age of Aquarius. These Ages are periods 2147 years in length, one twelfth of the Great Year, aeons that are said to encompass and explain broad themes of human cultural evolution. Carl Jung discusses these themes in his essay *Aion*, where he comments that "through the precession of the equinoxes, the spring-point moves into this sign [of Pisces] and thus inaugurates an age in which the "fish" was used as a name for the God who became a man, who was born as a fish and was sacrificed as a ram, who had fishermen for disciples and wanted to make them fishers of men, who fed the multitude with miraculously multiplying fishes, who was himself eaten as a fish, the "holier food," and whose followers are little fishes." (92) Building on these insights, we can see that the present shift of Ages marks the symbolic theme of the shift in human consciousness from belief to knowledge as a guiding principle.

Here we see the path of the equinox point along the ecliptic over the Great Year, illustrating the slow movement of the spring point over recorded history.



The foundation of these concepts is in physics, not magic. This paper explores the Great Year as the natural framework of Biblical eschatology, against the writings of

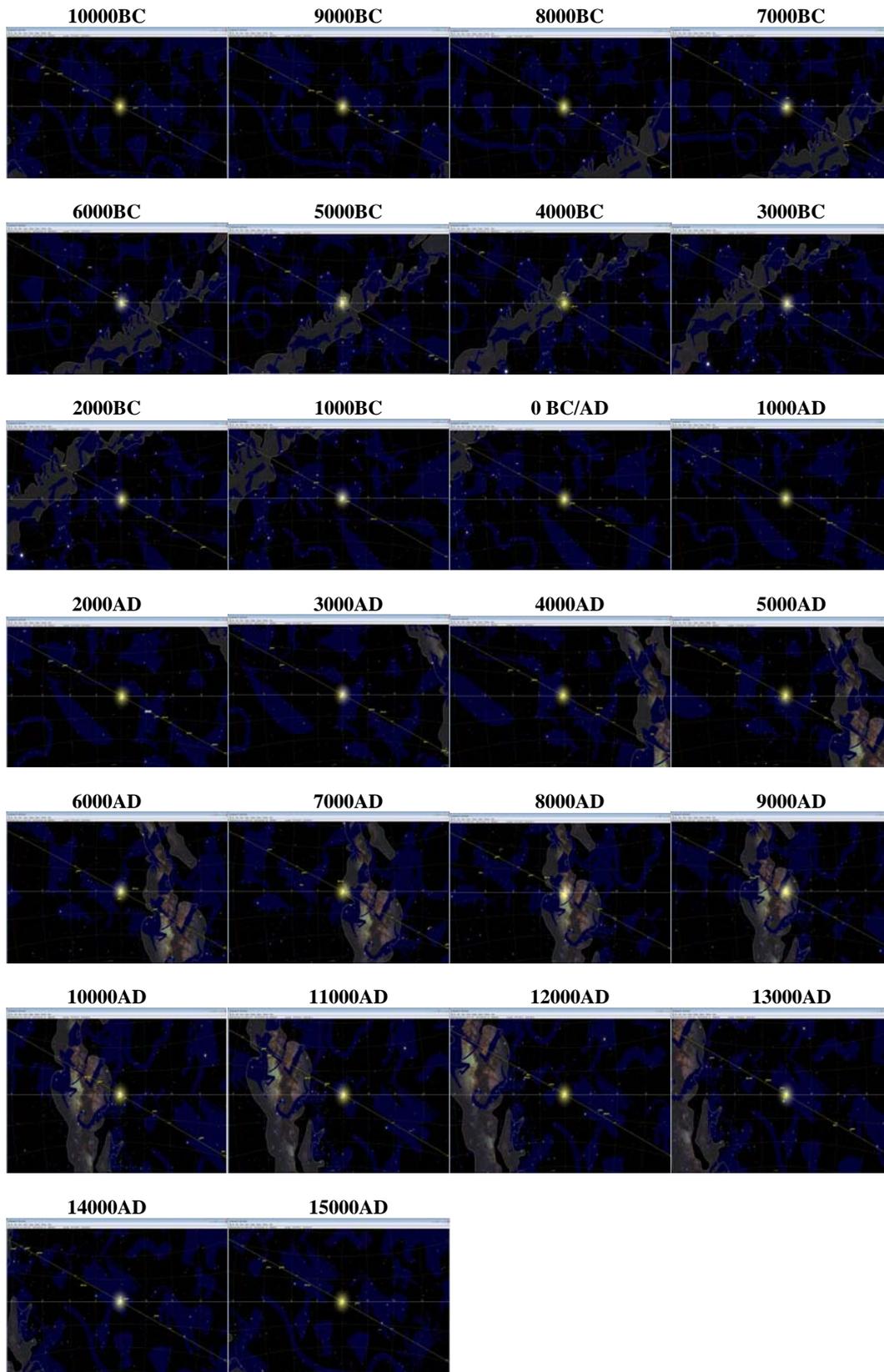
HP Blavatsky. Analysis of the Great Year provides a method to bridge faith and reason and thereby reconcile science and religion. The high spirit of theosophy, with its insights into the wisdom of God, is grounded in the slow cyclic patterns of the Great Year, providing a basis to restore the secret doctrine of true religion at the heart of the perennial philosophy as the basis of human salvation.

Setting the Great Year as the framework for the emerging new paradigm, we see that our planet is now reaching the end of the Age of Pisces. This slow movement of the annual perceived position of the sun against the galaxy provides the basis for a paradigm shift as great as the Copernican heliocentric revolution, through a new synthesis of the old supernatural thesis of religion and its modern natural scientific antithesis. The structure of the Great Year, shown in the diagrams above, enables us to consider space-time in its true four dimensional reality, seeing the three dimensions of space against the fourth dimension of duration, understood at planetary scale.

The BC/AD moment of the birth of Jesus Christ is the turning point of time, the alpha and omega point of the Great Year, providing a direct cosmic correlation for Christian beliefs. The equinox reached the alpha-omega point of the zodiac at the time of Christ, crossing from Aries, the first sign of the zodiac, into Pisces, the last sign. If the Age of Pisces began at the year 0, the Age of Aquarius is due to start in the year 2147, providing a physical basis to interpret Biblical eschatology.

To further illustrate the physical process, the following star charts show the precession of the equinox since the Age of Leo in 10,000 BC, one frame per thousand years. The pictures show the position of the Sun at the northern spring equinox, with the line across the middle marking the shifting position of the celestial equator, the constant diagonal line from upper left to lower right showing the zodiac, and the other diagonal showing the galaxy drifting across. We see here, at both 4300 BC and 8500 AD, the chi-rho cross seen by Constantine, a theme that is also discussed by Plato in the *Timaeus* as the relation of the same and the different, the galaxy and the zodiac. The equinox reached the centre of the celestial chi-rho cross, slowly moving across the Milky Way, at the time that Judeo-Christian doctrine calls the fall from grace, about 4300 BC. The equinox point has since inscribed the Ages of Taurus, Aries and Pisces, and will soon move into Aquarius.

The Great Year: Position of the Sun at March Equinox



The Secret Doctrine

Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* is a major milestone of the human intellect. Reading this remarkable work today, with the advantage of more than a century of scientific progress since it was written, we can see an astounding genius of courageous vision, pointing a path to human enlightenment. A reading of *The Secret Doctrine* that focuses on the truth in it, and how Blavatsky contributes to a decisive shift in the paradigm of human knowledge, can show how it points us towards an understanding of the Great Year of the Ages of the Zodiac as the structure of time.

There are many ideas in theosophy where a speculative excitement races ahead of the available evidence, especially with Blavatsky's sense that an objective validation of esoteric wisdom could emerge out of the ferment of science of her day. This leads her to argue for many ideas that with hindsight are wrong. Rather than dwelling on mistaken claims, my preference is to explore how Theosophy shows deep insight into the nature of reality and time, through comparison of the ideas of Madame Blavatsky with real empirical cycles of the earth, to find ideas that are entirely contestable and true against a modern objective scientific understanding.

Madame Blavatsky sets our intellectual horizon wider than our modern conventions, whose cradles are identified in Athens and Jerusalem. This effort to shake the temporal foundations of western thought is one reason she is vilified by dogmatic bigots, as she exposes the implicit racism within dominant cultural assumptions. Looking to how Western thought learnt from India and Egypt, theosophy opens the potential to solve some of the enduring mysteries of our planetary existence. Especially, I will argue, *The Secret Doctrine* helps us to see how the fragmentary wisdom of the Bible may be reconstructed as a coherent message. Our modern mentality sees European Greeks as the first thinkers, even though the Greeks themselves said Egypt and the Middle East were sources of ancient wisdom for them. Blavatsky helps us to move past the western children tossing pebbles into a pool to find the eastern reality of the pool itself.

Theosophy tells us there is no religion higher than truth. To this end, HP Blavatsky asks us to look through the actual words to find their real but hidden meanings. Therefore, when we read her descriptions of cycles of billions of years, and of realms of existence above the material, ideas that do not appear correct, we should consider these as allegories for concepts that are compatible with empirical observation. When Blavatsky discusses human civilizations lasting for hundreds of thousands of years before recorded history, we can reasonably look to the scientific record, especially modern DNA analysis, to suggest her speculation was in error. However, science does tell us that the human brain has been its current size for at least 50,000 years, since the great migration out of Africa. We do not know much of what people thought about for the first 45,000 years of this long time. It is quite reasonable to speculate that astronomers in India and Egypt spent thousands of years developing the foundations of our modern knowledge, foundations that have been made invisible by the cataclysms and upheavals of history.

Considering HPB as a guide, we can profitably read her as a pioneer on the path of truth, excavating the foundations of the Abrahamic beliefs to find the cosmic and historic ground beneath the popular myths. For example, Indian ideas of the day of Brahma lasting 4.32 billion years sit behind the temporal framework of the Bible. The long timeframe of the Manvantara should not be seen as literal, but as allegory for the real temporal cycle of the earth. Two zodiac ages together have an actual period

of 4294 years, very close to the traditional estimate of 4320 years, one millionth of the traditional Day of Brahma. This traditional estimate links the Great Year to the sexagesimal temporal framework of Babylonian astronomy; for example there are 43,200 seconds in 12 hours. Multiplication by six and sixty scale up through the roughly six times sixty length of the year of about 360 days, to the six time six times sixty years of the Age period of about 2160 years, and the twelve ages of the Great Year forming the traditional period of 25920 years. We can readily imagine that ancient Indian astronomers made accurate calculations of the speed of precession, but these calculations were lost and corrupted into the Vedic imagination of billions of years.

When HPB refers to texts as 'blinds' she suggests the authors concealed their intent. I suspect that this concealment is also produced by the fact that, like Saint Paul, many of the esoteric authors look 'through a glass darkly', dimly perceiving an ultimate truth that they struggled to describe. Paul tells us that at the second coming of Jesus Christ we will see God face to face. HP Blavatsky is one of the prophetic giants on whose shoulders we can stand to begin to understand what Paul meant with this prediction.

If we consider the Great Year as the organizing principle for ancient thought, the references to billions of years, an inordinately long time, make sense if we see the Day of Brahma in the 25,920 year estimate of the Great Year, dividing the conventional period of the Day of Brahma by one million to produce the 4320 years conventionally seen as two ages of the zodiac.

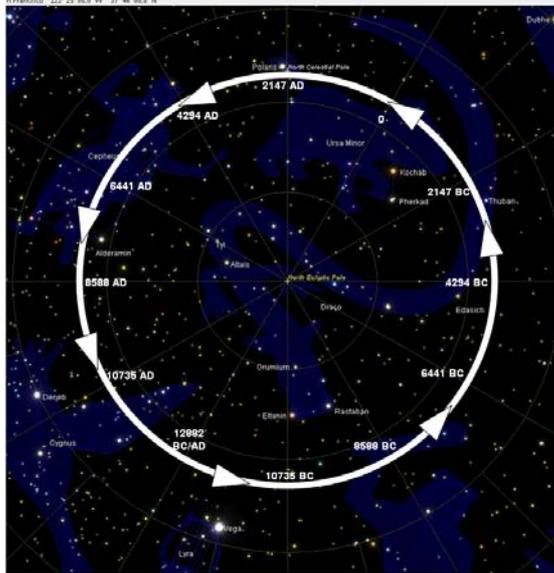
References in the Bible to the Great Year

The alpha and omega symbolism provides an obvious correlation between the story of Jesus Christ and the cycle of the Great Year. The beginning and ending moment of the movement of the equinox from Aries to Pisces at the time of Christ was a central theme linking stellar observation with evolving religious consciousness. Other such obvious Biblical correlations with the stars include Gemini with the Cherubim guarding the path to Paradise; the wheels within wheels described by Ezekiel with the nested cosmic circles of the day, the year and the Great Year; the four creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation with the four fixed signs of the zodiac; the holy city of New Jerusalem with the Great Year; the twelve jewels with the twelve Zodiac Ages; the Milky Way with the River of Life, the Zodiac with the Tree of Life, Orion's Belt with the three magi; Argo with the Ark and the manger; the loaves and fishes with the signs of Virgo and Pisces; Adam with the Age of Taurus; Abraham with the Age of Aries; Jesus Christ with the Age of Pisces; and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ with the Age of Aquarius.

To illustrate one compelling explanation of how the Bible encodes cosmic allegory that completely overturn traditional explanations, let's look now at Revelation 13:2: In a cryptic description of the events of the 3.5 years of tribulation, the Bible says "the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority." This text has long puzzled readers, with various attempts to match the story to human empires. Following the lead of Madame Blavatsky, we can instead look to see how the authors were presenting an old secret cosmic doctrine.

There is no leopard among the traditional constellations, but perhaps like the 5000 men of the loaves and fishes story we have here a reference to the spots of the

leopard, ie the stars themselves. If we consider the bear of this story to be Ursa Minor, the current location of the North Celestial Pole, or Ursa Major, we also see the lion is Leo, and the dragon is Draco, as shown in the following diagrams.



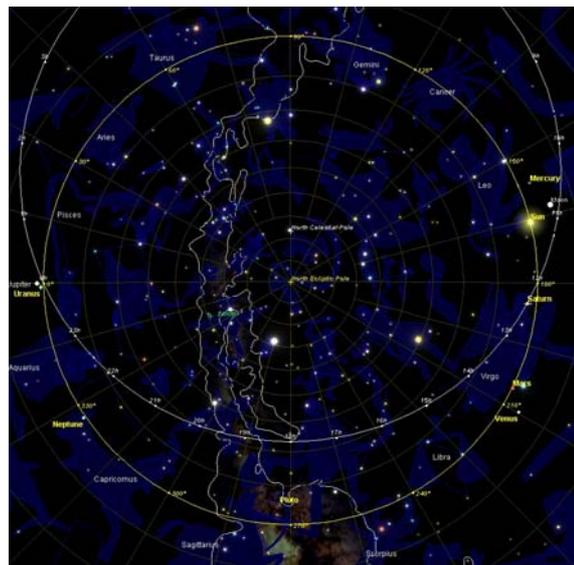
In this diagram, showing the movement of the North Celestial Pole (the pole of the earth) around the North Ecliptic Pole (the pole of the sun) over the course of the Great Year, we see that over the Ages of Pisces and Aries the pole has precessed anti-clockwise through the Little Bear, Ursa Minor, and for Ages before that the pole precessed through the Dragon, Draco. If we consider the quarter of a Great Year roughly since 4294 BC as the time of the fall, we see that for the two thousand years of the Age of Taurus, the pole was still in the constellation of the dragon, while for the last four thousand years, through the

Ages of Aries and Pisces, the north pole has been in the constellation of the bear. The north ecliptic pole, the central point of this star chart at the dragon's foot, is the spot around which the celestial pole rotates over the period of each Great Year. In 2788 BC the pole star was Thuban in Draco, and in 12,200 BC, in the time some call the Golden Age, the pole star was Vega in Lyra. By the end of the Age of Aquarius in 4294 AD the north celestial pole will have precessed to reach the crown of Cepheus.

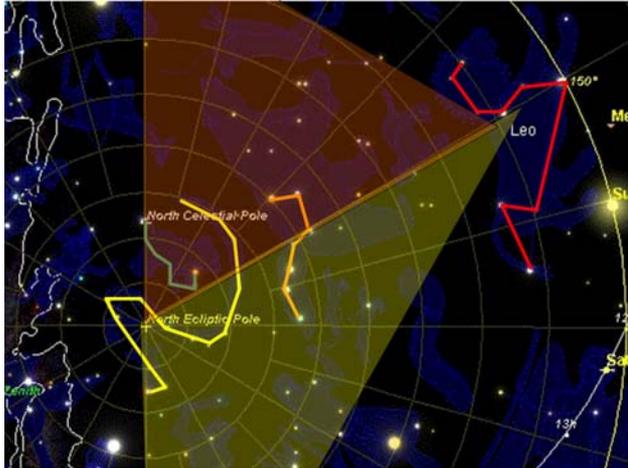
To briefly mention a typical resonance with other mythology, a reading of this shift of the pole against the story of Jason and the Argonauts can see Jason stealing past the protecting dragon to get the Golden Fleece as his reaching back in time through the age of the dragon to the golden age when Vega was the Pole Star.

Zooming out to set the north ecliptic pole against the zodiac and the Milky Way, we have the following sky clock, again with the north celestial pole moving anti-clockwise around the diagram once per Great Year. Here we see the zodiac nodes at left and right where the ecliptic crosses the celestial equator, into tropical Aries/sidereal Pisces on the left and into tropical Libra/sidereal Virgo on the right.

The Milky Way bisects the sky. Considering the Great Year cycle like a Day of Brahma, with day and night over one Great Year rather than the 4.32 billion years of tradition, we have dawn and dusk of the cosmic day of the Great Year at the moments when the equinoxes cross the Milky Way, at the top and bottom of the picture, midnight at the left, with the equinox in Pisces and Aquarius, and midday at the right, with the equinox in Leo and Virgo.



We may say from this analogy that the dragon, ie the Age of Taurus when the North Pole was in Draco, gave his power and seat and authority to the Bear/Lion/Leopard, ie the Ages of Aries and Pisces when the Pole has traversed Ursa Minor.



Against the imagery of the bear and lion in Rev 13:2, we clearly see Leo and Ursa Major as the upper and lower stars observed in the sky at the time of the fall in 4294 BC at the dawn of the Age of Taurus. The Dragon Draco has passed his seat as lode star to the beast with mouth of a lion and feet of a bear and starry spots of the leopard. [Revelation 12:3-4](#) says “another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon ... His tail

swept a third of the stars out of the sky.” In 10750 BC the poles aligned to Eltanin, the nostril of the dragon Draco. We see here the dragon whose tail sweeps one third of the stars of the sky. For one third of the Great Year, and one third of the sky, the pole precessed through Draco, finally moving into the little bear in 1650 BC, when the dragon gave the bear-lion his seat as described at Revelation 13:2.

These comments have just scratched the surface of the astrotheological reading of the Bible that is possible through building on the powerful insights of *The Secret Doctrine*. Madame Blavatsky points out repeatedly that the effort to see mythic and stellar themes in Christianity has been suppressed but is central to true understanding. As we now move towards a change of the zeitgeist, we may hope that the spirit of the age will become more receptive towards dialogue about the real meaning and basis of human spirituality.