

## Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

### Lesson 9 The Original Star Trek

Matthew 2:1,2,7-11

“We have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.”

There are two errors in the first line of the beloved Christmas carol, “We three kings of orient are.” First there is an assumption of three kings since there were three gifts. Secondly, they were not kings. But as Tevia, the Father character on the film *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*, replied when asked, “How do we keep our balance?” “I’ll tell you in one word. TRADITION!” “Without our traditions our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.”

#### The origin and expertise of the wise men

“Wise men” - The original Greek word is μάγοι - *magoi*. The Septuagint (LXX) - the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translated this word “Magicians,” of whom Daniel was “chief” (2:48). We know something of this prestigious cast from the writings of Philo who was a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Jesus living in Alexandria, Egypt. He wrote in praise of an eastern school of *Magi* who were learned men, devoted to astronomy, and to religion. They were held in high esteem by the Persian court, serving as counselors. Daniel’s *Magi* of Babylon would have been absorbed when the Persians conquered. This is apparently the link to their awareness of a Judean royal star. The scroll of Daniel, and the prophets whom Daniel followed held the clues to a royal birth. Matthew identifies their origin from the East, which ties in with the cast mentioned by Philo. The motive of the Magi in coming to Jerusalem tells us a great deal more about them. They were interested in Jewish things. They wanted to worship a Jewish king. Is it possible that some of the Magi were of Jewish descent? Less than 43,000 Jews returned from Babylon when Ezra, led the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 2:64). Even as late as 1948 multitudes of Jews were residing in Iraq. This could help explain why they were taken so seriously by Herod and Jewish scribes. Otherwise they would have been deeply disdainful of pagan astrologers and their idolatrous beliefs. If they were Jewish, then they would be the first to join the shepherds as Messianic Jewish believers. As Jews, or possible Jewish proselytes, they would have searched for the spiritual laws that govern souls. As astronomers they recorded and calculated the movements of the galaxy to divine spiritual guidance. The precision of the stars aligned with a predicted rising of the Jews at a chosen time in the Jewish scriptures and in Judea the most Jewish of all places.

#### The length of the Original Star Trek

It was approximately a 1000- 1400 mile journey depending on origin. The eastern-church has historically held that there were 12 days between the birth of Jesus and the arrival of the Magi, ie: 12 Days of Christmas tradition. The Wise Men arriving 12 days after Jesus’ birth does not allow for the distance traveled.

Neither was there enough time for the wise men to arrive before the days of Mary’s purification. “When the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). The time of this dedication was 40 days according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:2-4). If Joseph and Mary had received gold then why wouldn’t they have purchased a lamb instead of the minimal sacrifices of turtledoves allowed for the poor? So, how long did it take? 1445 miles x 3.5mph (avg camel speed) = 412 hours / 8 hours per day x 6 day/week = 9-10 weeks. It would have taken less time than two years because of the decree of Herod to slay all under two years old.<sup>i</sup> Jesus was referred to as a “young child” by Herod and the Magi

Matthew 2:8,9,11). That He was found in a “house” makes it safe to deduce that He was between the age 3 months and 2 years old.

**Three Biblical clues from the three section of the Tanakh** The scriptural origin of this knowledge came from the three divisions of the Jewish Scripture that Jesus identified on the road to Emmaus, “all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44 ). TANAKH is an acronym for 1. The Law – *Torah* – **TA**; 2. The prophets - *Nevi'im* – **NA**; 3. The writings included poetic books and minor-prophets. – *Ketuvim* - **KH**.

## 1. The Torah, the books of the Law, gave the clues of a scepter and a star.

### A Rising New king

“There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Judah.” (Numb. 24:17; Genesis 49:10) “In the Hebrew phrase ‘there shall come a *Star* out of Jacob.’ **וְיָרֵךְ כּוֹכָב**, two Hebrew words are ‘to be understood A STAR SHOT FORTH,’ it is related in meaning to the phrase ‘He stretched his bow, for a shooting star passes like an arrow.’”<sup>iii</sup> It seemed not only to propel them forward but to direct them as a guide. Thus, some have conjectured that it was a meteor. But how could a meteor become stationary over a point on the horizon? It has been suggested that it could have been the “shekinah” glory of God, seen to move before the children of Israel in the wilderness then become temporarily stationary. Was it a star, a meteor, the Shekinah or a unique planetary alignment? Some have proposed that a planetary conjunction/alignment can appear as a star to the naked eye. Of course, Creator God could just as easily have created a one-off star for this occasion. Both Numbers and Matthew call it a star. Whatever the cause, this was a stellar sign in the cosmic clock, wound up before time by the Creator, to visually signify the exact moment of His incarnate birth. Ultimately, Jesus is both called the the “Day Star” (2 Peter 1:19), and the “bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16).

In an interesting book, *The Witness of The Stars*, British clergyman E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913), one of the most respected Bible scholars of the 19th century, used astronomy, celestial charts, and quotations from the Bible to make his case for God’s revelation within the movements and configurations of the stars themselves. Beginning with Psalm 19 that says, “the heavens declared the glory of God.” One of the purposes of the lights in the heavens was for “signs.” “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and **let them be for signs**, and for seasons, and for days, and years,” (Genesis 1:14).

## 2. The *Nevi'im* - writings<sup>iii</sup> gave the location.

The wise men knew Judea was the region from Genesis 49:10. The second clue gave the location - Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Even if they knew of Micah 4:8 and 5:2 from the third section of the Hebrew scriptures, which were written decades before Daniel’s time, they would have thought it necessary to confirm it by their wisemen counterparts, at Jerusalem. Herod called the Jewish scribes “wise men.” It is possible that both of these eastern and Judean Wise Men spoke the same Hebrew language because they knew the Hebrew Scriptures.

“When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him... And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently **what time the star appeared**. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and **search diligently for the young child**; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also” (Matthew 2:3-6).

This readily available source to the scribal experts makes their later rejection of Jesus, even more astonishing.

They accused that He could not be Messiah “But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him”(John 7:41-43). These experts knew the prophesied location and would have not forgotten the inquiry of these prestigious *Magi*. Furthermore the slaughter of the innocents by Herod in Bethlehem because of the suspicion of a newly born King, would be indelibly imprinted on their minds and emotions. If “all Jerusalem was troubled” then all the scribes and Pharisees would have remembered the significance of Bethlehem. Although thirty years had passed, it stretches all credulity to pose that they had forgotten. At worst the scribes suppressed this information or at best they neglected to even ask Jesus of His ancestral home or genealogy, since their minds were prejudiced against Him. This played to the scriptural ignorance of the Judean masses among whom they could foment opposition to Jesus.

“About 60 years earlier, in 63 BC, Magi made a presentation to the Roman Senate. They described celestial portents indicating that a new ruler had been born. The Senate responded by ordering the death of baby boys in the candidate age range. Sound familiar? It turns out that when Herod ordered the slaughter of children in Bethlehem he may have been following a sort of Roman precedent. That precedent may be one reason Jerusalem was troubled at the news the Wise Men brought. Perhaps they realized the Romans might shed blood in response.”<sup>iv</sup>

### 3. Jewish writings - The Ketuvim established a time frame for the rise of an heir to David’s scepter.

The third clue, which was from the last division of scripture - The Ketuvim, included the writings of Daniel who was given a prophetic time frame in which Messiah would be on earth. “Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince *shall be* seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks” = 483 years (Daniel 9:25). Daniel went on to say, Messiah would die prematurely after 483 years, “shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself...”(Daniel 9:26). The Messianic clock started ticking on March 14, 445 BC, with the decree of Artaxerxes, which allowed the exiled Jews to return, restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The King Messiah would have to be alive within a window, between the end of 483 years and before the destruction of the second Temple in 70 AD. Herod had already reigned for 34 years and died in 4 BC. Did news of the magnificent Temple reconstruction alert the *Magi* to begin watching the heavens for the Judean star sign?

“When they had heard the king, they departed; and, 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” (Matthew 2:7-10). This phrase is only used twice in the N.T. meaning extreme mega cheer.

It seems that the star reappeared, but this time not to the east but toward Bethlehem which was only 5-6 miles south. The same heavenly GPS that brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem now guided their pathway to the same small town. The celestial clock of the universe was about to chime in a new era. So quickly we peruse over this familiar account and fail to see the arduous travel and timing of this divine itinerary.

The following are excerpts from the documentary, **The Star of Bethlehem** directed by Steven McEveety chronicling the years of research by Attorney Rick Larson. Larson reasoned that for many doubters, the account of the star is easily dismissed as myth. For many believers, it’s a mystery accepted on faith. He set out to resolve NASA’s astronomical calculations with the inspired Word of God as an apologetic for his faith.

Larson identified “Nine qualities of the “star.” He concluded that “If any qualification is missing, then we will assume we haven’t found our Star. All of the qualifications come from the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 2.”

- 1) birth
- 2) kingship
- 3) Jews
- 4) rise in the east
- 5) exact time
- 6) Herod’s lack of knowledge
- 7) endurance over a considerable period of time. The Magi saw it, from Babylon, traveled to Judea and saw it still.
- 8) It moved ahead of them as they traveled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
- 9) The Star stopped! Can a star do that?”<sup>v</sup>

“You must know more to understand just how very troubled Herod and Jerusalem became at the Magis’ news. Historians tell us that respect for the stars and guidance derived from them was at a peak. Both ancient historians and the Bible make it clear that the Jews of this period expected a new Jewish ruler to arise, based upon Jewish prophecy. And it was accepted that the stars could announce such an arrival.”

- A. As examples, Suetonius reports in *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius* (LXIX) that Tiberius Caesar, who reigned at the time of Christ’s birth, was “addicted” to astrology. Tacitus reports in *The Histories* (Book II) that Emperor Vespasian kept a personal astrologer, Seleucus, and that his troops were familiar with celestial signs.
- B. Tacitus, *The Histories* (Book V), writes: “...most [of the Jews] firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judea should possess the world. “In *De Vita Caesarum: Divus Vespasian*, Suetonius records that “[t]here had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. “He goes on to say that Vespasian was so concerned with this prophecy of the Christ that he attempted to exterminate the entire Davidic family line—even helpless old men were killed.
- C. Josephus appears not to have believed the prophecy, but he records that it had great influence on others. In *Wars* (6.5.4), he even states his belief that the prediction was the cause of the first Jewish War against the Romans. “But now, what did most elevate [the Jews] in undertaking this war was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how ‘about that time, one from their own country should become governor of the habitable earth.’ The Jews took this prediction to belong to themselves in particular, and many of the wise men were thereby deceived in their determination.”<sup>vi</sup>

Larson searched. “Did anything interesting happen in the ordinary night skies over the Middle East in 4 - 1 BC?” His findings are astonishing supporting the theory of the star of Bethlehem as a unique planetary alignment and a rare apparent retrograde movement from earth’s viewpoint. He summarizes:

**“Jupiter had finished crowning Regulus.** The Planet of Kings traveled on through the star field toward another spectacular rendezvous, this time with Venus, the Mother Planet. This conjunction was so close and so bright that it is today displayed in hundreds of planetariums around the world at Christmas time by scientists who may know nothing of Messiah. They do it because what Jupiter did makes such a great planetarium show. Jupiter appeared to join Venus. The planets could not be distinguished with the naked eye. If our *Magi* had had a telescope, they could have seen that the planets sat one atop the other, like a figure eight. Each contributed its full brightness to what became the most brilliant star man had ever seen. Jupiter completed this step of the starry dance as it was setting in the west. That evening, our Babylonian *Magi* would have seen the spectacle of his career while facing toward Judea. No one alive had ever seen such a conjunction. At the end of their travel, which may have taken months, these experts arrived in Jerusalem. They told their tale, and “all Jerusalem was disturbed.” Herod wanted to know two things: when the Star had appeared, and where this baby was. The *Magi* presumably described the timing of events starting in September of 3 BC and continuing through June of 2 BC. (According to Larson’s calculations). Herod sent them to Bethlehem in search of the child with orders that they return to tell where was.”<sup>vii</sup>

The significance of this star is seen in the priority of Eastern *Magi*, the knowledge of the Judean scribes and the rash action of King Herod. All the hopes and dreams of Israel, the scribes and the *Magi* now lay wrapped up in the One, lying in a manger underneath that star. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:12-14). All the prophecies from Genesis 49:10 to Micah 5:2 were destined to arrive at the feet of Jesus son of David. Each of us must kneel at His feet in repentance and faith.

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Matthew 2:11

- Fell down & worshipped him - did him homage as King of the Jews.
- Opened their treasures - the boxes, etc., in which they had brought their gold, etc.
- Presented unto him gifts - because he was a distinguished prince.
  - Gold - Gift for a king
  - Frankincense - Prayer - fragrant incense when burned, in worship, was a pleasant offering to God.
  - Myrrh - Anointing – one of the essential oils for anointing a King

“ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. (Matthew 2:12-18).

Macrobius (ca. AD 400), one of the last pagan writers in Rome, in his book *Saturnalia*, wrote: “When it was heard that, as part of the slaughter of boys up to two years old, Herod, king of the Jews, had ordered his own son to be killed, he [the Emperor Augustus] remarked, ‘It is better to be Herod’s pig [Gr. hys] than his son’ [Gr. huios]” (2.4.11; cited in Brown 1993:226). Macrobius could have given us a chronological key. If he was referring to the death of Antipater in 4 BC, the slaughter of the Innocents would have been one of the last, if not the last, brutal killings of Herod before he died. Herod would not kill a pig because he kept kosher, at least among the Jews; yet he had no qualms killing his own sons!<sup>viii</sup>

#### Academic sources of “Bethlehem Star” Documentary

[“When Did Herod the Great Reign?”](#), Andrew Steinmann, *Novum Testamentum*, Volume 51, Number 1, 2009 , pp. 1-29

[“Josephus Reexamined: Unraveling the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius,”](#) David W. Beyer, *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II*, edited by E. Jerry Vardaman (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998) ISBN 0-86554-582-0.

<http://www.paschershoesin.com/jordan-pas-cher>

[The Handbook of Biblical Chronology](#), Jack Finegan (Revised Edition; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) ISBN 1-56563-143-9.

[Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ](#), Harold W. Hoehner (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1977) ISBN 0-310-26211-9.

[“Dating the Crucifixion,”](#) Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, *Nature Magazine*, Volume 306, December 22/29, 1983.

[“Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem,”](#) Roger Sinnott, *Sky and Telescope*, December, 1968, pp. 384-386.

[The Star That Astonished the World](#), Ernest L. Martin (Second Edition; Portland, Oregon: ASK Publications, 1996) ISBN 0-94-5657-87-0.

#### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> [How Long Did It Take The Wise Men To Get To Jesus - Proven Way](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Artscroll Series, *The TORAH with Rasi’s Commentary*, Mesorah Publications Limited, Brooklyn , NY, 2015, P 309

<sup>iii</sup> [Ketuvim, Writings, Hagiographa, Five Megillot and Messianic Scriptures – Some View on the World \(wordpress.com\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.bethlehemstar.net/>

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid

<sup>viii</sup> <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/new-testament-era/2411-the-slaughter-of-the-innocents-historical-fact-or-legendary-fiction>