

The Star Of Bethlehem

Part 1: Scriptural Constraints

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Today we continue with Science In Light Of Scripture Series. Previous class notes can be viewed and downloaded at <https://www.valleybible.net/science-in-light-of-scripture>

Since Christmas, 2023 is fresh in our minds, we will examine a scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem over the next two weeks.. Today, our focus is understanding the Scriptural basis, or in our metaphor, the light that will illuminate our scientific discoveries and conclusions. Science must fit the Bible, not the other way around. No one would consider assembling a jigsaw puzzle without having enough light to see each piece; today we will focus on the light given us in the Scriptures, light that we will use next week to build a reasonable scientific explanation of every detail about the Star. If there is a true scientific explanation for the Star it must explain every attribute of the Star and all behaviors of the people in the Biblical narrative. Not just some attributes and behaviors but all of them. Just as an eyewitness account can explain every piece of physical evidence discovered at a crime scene, today we will examine the eyewitness testimony of Scripture that will explain every detail of a physical Star. We will not presume that the Star **must** have been purely physical because God is the Master Author of the supernatural, the miraculous. **The supernatural explanation is always on the table!** In fact, any true scientific explanation must have its source in the miraculous because all matter and energy was miraculously created by our God; every planet, Star, the Moon and Sun was made by and “launched into orbit” by the Creator of Heaven and earth. He is the One who made every atom and ordered each one in our bodies to make us able to do what we can do. He always deserves the glory and honor in everything, including a physical Star of Bethlehem because He made the physical realm.

Read Matt Chapter 2

“Familiar Christmas traditions do not always have scriptural support.” Warren Weirsbe.

Scripture leaves no doubt that Shepherds and Magi both visited Jesus, but was this visit at the same location and also at the same time as our familiar Christmas Nativity obviously imply?? Probably not when considering several passages.

From Matthew we learn that the Magi arrived after His birth

2:1 Now **after** Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea...

In contrast, Lk 2:11 tells us that Christ was born on the same day that the angels gave the announcement to the Shepherds

11 [Angel speaking] for **today** in the city of David **there has been born** for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Also, they left their sheep to see Jesus without waiting as Luke tells us. Just after the Angelic Host leaves, we read

Lk 2:16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby[G1025] as He lay in the manger.

❖ **So the Magi's visit was after the Shepherd's visit.**

There are different words in Matthew compared to Luke to describe Jesus and where He was located. From Matthew we learn that the Magi

2:11 After coming into the **house**[G3614] they saw the **Child**[G3813]...

But from Luke 2 we learn that after the Angelic announcement, the Shepherds

16 ...came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the **baby**[G1025] as He lay in the **manger**.

The different term for Jesus is expected because He is younger when the Shepherds see Him. The Shepherds found Him in some kind of stable whereas the Magi found Him in a house. How is this apparent change of location explained? Did they move to a house after the population of Bethlehem dwindled to normal after the census? Not necessarily. It was common for the ground floor of houses to keep livestock inside where they would be protected. It was also common for homes to be built near one of the numerous caves in Bethlehem, particularly on the long rock ridge where the Church of the Nativity now stands. It is reasonable to assume that Joseph had relatives in Bethlehem and that he went first to the house of family to find a place to stay. But it is stated that there was no room for them in the inn[G2646]. Houses usually had a separate room for guests. In fact, in two parallel passages Jesus uses the same Greek word G2646 as guest room.

Lk 22:11 "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the **guest**[G2646] **room**[G2646] in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?""

Mk 14:14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My **guest**[G2646] **room**[G2646] in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?""

The Zondervan Dictionary of Biblical Imagery makes this comment

Rhetorically this introduces a new and disturbing element into the Christmas story. Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem because Joseph had to register in "his own town" (Lk 2:3). Assuming that Joseph had family here and given what we know of the ancient hospitality code, we would presume that Joseph would have sought lodging for himself and Mary in the home of a relative. But upon Joseph and Mary's arrival, the family members would not make this room available, perhaps because of the questions that lingered around Mary's pregnancy. Thus Luke's statement about there being no room in the guest room suggests yet another indignity that challenged Joseph and Mary that night.

❖ **So, in summary, it is reasonable that Joseph and Mary asked a relative for lodging but their guest room was not available so they stayed in the ground floor stable, or perhaps a cave stable of the relative where Mary gave birth and the Shepherds visited Him as a baby. Later when the guest room was available the Magi visited them in the house when Jesus was a toddler.**

Also, since King Herod slaughtered not only newborns but children up to two years of age we conclude that Herod believed that Jesus was perhaps toddler age when the Magi arrived. From Matthew we read

Matt 2:16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from **two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.**

- ❖ **It appears that the Star in the east seen before sunrise by the Magi marked the time Jesus was born, at least as far as Herod was concerned. This appearance of the Star did not lead the Magi to Jerusalem as some believe. Scripture is clear that only the second appearance of the Star led them to Bethlehem and to the house where Jesus was.**

Continuing with Matt 2:1

“...in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying”,

Many scholars have limited their time frame of Jesus birth to the period before 4 BC, as most of them accept the commonly held belief that Herod the Great died in 4 BC. We know a great deal about Herod's death, from the works of Flavius Josephus, who stated that Herod died after a lunar eclipse and was buried before Passover. There were lunar eclipses in March 23 of 5 BC (total), March 13 of 4 BC (partial) and January 10 of 1 BC (total). The day of the eclipse, after the executions, it was said that the moon that night was red with the blood of the murdered rabbis. The eclipse of March 13 of 4 BC was only a partial - 40% at that. This would not have turned the moon red. Furthermore, there was not enough time between this eclipse, and the final burial of Herod's body at the Herodian, once all the customs, and mourning periods required at the time, to take place. The March 23, 5 BC eclipse suffers from the same problems. The source of selecting the incorrect lunar eclipse is probably the footnotes in Josephus' writings, added by someone else, which stated that the eclipse of 4 BC was the eclipse associated with Herod's death. But Josephus himself penned only that Herod died after a lunar eclipse and was buried before Passover. This is why most scholars have asserted that Herod died in 4 BC, relying on footnotes selecting one lunar eclipse from several possible candidates. Josephus wrote about the circumstances surrounding Herod's funeral in great detail. Herod had left explicit instructions regarding his funeral; it was to be the grandest funeral in all of human history. There were only 29 days between the eclipse of March 13, 4 BC and Passover - and the public mourning period alone 30 days. , this whole process was more likely to have taken 8-10 weeks, not 29 days. The only eclipse that fits this timeline is that of January 10, 1BC. There is much more to this topic and this reference is a good one to read. https://www.tccsa.tc/articles/star_susan_carroll.pdf

- ❖ **Since the date of the Magi's arrival in Jerusalem was during Herod's reign, the Star they saw in the east must have been visible before January 10, 1BC**

Continuing with Matt 2:2

2 Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

Verse 2 possess the Magi's only question "...where is He..." implying that they already knew that the Star they saw in the east (literally before the Sun rose) was His Star and their purpose in coming was to worship Him. How did they come to know these things?

A very interesting correlation is now brought to light. Matt 2:1 says "...magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem..." If the Magi were descendants from the group of wisemen in Babylon (located east of Jerusalem) at the time Daniel was head over them, they may have known the prophetic message given by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel regarding the arrival of the Messiah in Da. 9:25

"So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

The correlation is this: Babylonian records show a very keen interest in predicting the date of the first visible appearance of stars and planets before sunrise called their helical rising. They even invented calculus to do so predating by over a thousand years the use of calculus! No civilization was as advanced as the Babylonians were in calculating positions of celestial objects.

- ❖ **So, the Magi may have used the prophetic timeline in Dan 9:25 (seven weeks and sixty-two weeks) along with their skill at predicting helical risings to be able to predict "His Star" and subsequently see it for themselves...something that their ancestors knew about but lived too early to observe it. This possibility sheds light on why the Magi knew so much more than everyone else in Jerusalem. They came to Jerusalem confident that the Star they saw was good reason to pack-up gifts and travel hundreds of miles to worship Him. It was much more than a wim!**

Returning to Matt 2 we read

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

Herod must have been in Jerusalem to hear this prophecy because that is where the chief priests and scribes were located. But then, in verse 7 the location changes. The words "secretly[G2977] called[G2564] the magi" are significant. Strongs G2977 always describes a change of place, such as in Matt 1:19 when Joseph thought of sending Mary away secretly when she was pregnant. Strongs G2564 means to call in some way, send for, direct to come (Mt 2:7)

What caused Herod to call the Magi to another place? It was right after the news about Bethlehem came to light. Was it that Herod preferred no one else know about his future plans? Notice that when they were at the secret place, Herod asked the Magi when they saw the star, information Herod would use to determine the age of children He would kill from Matthew 2:7. Also if the Magi left Jerusalem for Bethlehem on the main road they would have certainly been followed by a crowd and such publicity would not be welcomed by Herod as the soon-to-be dethroned king of the Jews. Where was this secret place? It was probably not far away from Bethlehem because Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem from this secret place. It is also significant that Herod did not see “His Star” for himself since he had to ask the Magi when it was visible.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”

❖ **So the Magi began their journey to Bethlehem from this secret place, probably not from Jerusalem.**

9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

Along the way they saw His Star again so the same Star appeared to them twice. The Star must have been between the Magi and Bethlehem in order to lead them toward Bethlehem. Finally, the Star “stood over” where He was. The words “stood over” means to stop. It could mean to stop it’s normal motion toward the horizon or to stop being seen because it had set.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

There is no doubt but that the same star was seen a second time.

❖ **So His Star was seen again and it led them toward Bethlehem where it either set below the horizon or stopped it’s westward motion over the house where Jesus was located.**

Finishing Matt 2 we read

11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

This concludes part 1 of the Star of Bethlehem. Next week we will explain a physical Star that answers every attribute we have just addressed with the diamond points. If you cannot attend next week’s class, you can watch a similar presentation on YouTube by searching YouTube for “How The Star Led The Magi To Jesus by Balogh.

