

*The Gospel According to*

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

CHAPTER 2, VERSES 1-12

NOTHING RECORDED

NOTHING RECORDED

NOTHING RECORDED

**2:1** - Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem<sub>2</sub> of Judaea in the days<sub>1</sub> of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men<sub>3</sub> from the east<sub>4</sub> to Jerusalem<sub>5</sub>,  
**2:2** - Saying, Where is he that is born King<sub>6</sub> of the Jews? for we have seen his star<sub>7</sub> in the east<sub>4</sub>, and are come to worship him.  
**2:3** - When Herod<sub>8</sub> the king had heard these things, he was troubled<sub>9</sub>, and all Jerusalem<sub>5</sub> with him.  
**2:4** - And when he had gathered all the chief priests<sub>10</sub> and scribes<sub>11</sub> of the people together, he demanded of them where<sub>12</sub> Christ should be born.  
**2:5** - And they said unto him, In Bethlehem<sub>2</sub> of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet<sub>14</sub>,  
**2:6** - And thou Bethlehem<sub>2</sub>, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda<sub>15</sub>: for out of thee shall come a Governor<sub>16</sub>, that shall rule<sub>17</sub> my people Israel.  
**2:7** - Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time<sub>18</sub> the star<sub>7</sub> appeared.  
**2:8** - And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child<sub>19</sub>; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.  
**2:9** - When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star<sub>7</sub>, which they saw in the east<sub>3</sub>, went before them, till it came and stood over<sub>13</sub> where the young child<sub>19</sub> was.  
**2:10** - When they saw the star<sub>7</sub>, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.  
**2:11** - ¶ And when they were come into the house<sub>21</sub>, they saw the young child<sub>19</sub> with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped<sub>20</sub> him: and when they had opened their treasures<sub>22</sub>, they presented unto him gifts; gold<sub>23</sub>, and frankincense<sub>24</sub>, and myrrh<sub>25</sub>.  
**2:12** - And being warned<sub>26</sub> of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country<sub>27</sub> another way<sub>28</sub>.

**CHRONOLOGY:** Between May 12, 4BCE\* and May 11, 3BCE\* (Based on the distance the Wise Men would have had to travel, most scholars suspect that they departed at least 9-12 months prior to the birth of the Savior, or arrived 9-12 months after his birth. Their arrival was also prior to the death of Herod the Great in 4-1 BCE.)

\* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

- Year theories: 1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
- 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger.
- 2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
- 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
- 4 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. **Supported by this Author.**
- 5 BCE - Supported by the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.

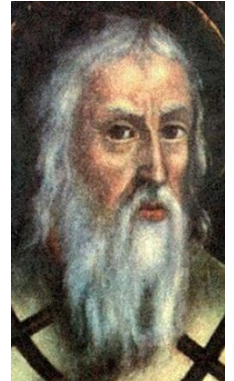
- 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
- 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

**LOCATION:** PERSIA, BETHLEHEM (The Ancient Trade Routes, Jericho, Jerusalem, Nazareth)

**COMMENTARY:** The Lord follows a specific pattern of witnesses as he furthers His plan for the Happiness of His Children. The wise men were part of this pattern for the birth of His Son, Jesus. Sent from a land of the East, a group of righteous men were directed to the Holy Land by a New Star in the Heavens. They were directed by the spirit. They saw the infant Savior, and the spirit lead them safely home by an alternate route so that King Herod could not affect the Lord's plan. They were special witnesses now. To what end we do not know. Who did they testify to? The Ten Tribes? Others? This chapter probably creates more questions than it answers. Oh that we could see all the workings of our Father.

## FOOTNOTES:

**1 - days** - This phrase, "...born in...the days of Herod the king..." gives reference and debate for the birth year of the Savior. It is used by Matthew to give a historical point of reference, establishing a date, or at least a time frame, for the Savior's birth. Unfortunately, Matthew's reference point is the days of Herod and the date of Herod's death is in question. According to commonly accepted historical data, Herod the Great died in 4BCE. Even so, there is much to be understood about ancient dates. Based upon the writings of Josephus (which appear to be mostly accurate), the best anchor date should be the war between Antony and Octavius Caesar. We have lots of historical writing establishing this date. Using this anchor date and calculations of relevant lunar events, it appears that Herod the Great died in 1BCE (not 4BCE). Though 4BCE has been favored by many, because it has a lunar eclipse on a fast day. But, an analysis of what Josephus said about Herod's kingships indicates an error in thinking.



DIONYSIUS  
EXIGUUS

Another issue is our dating system altogether. Our modern dating system is designed around the conception year of Jesus Christ. Under the direction of Pope John I, and completed under order of Pope Gregory XIII, a monk by the name of Dionysius Exiguus was commissioned to determine the date of the original Easter, or the Resurrection of Jesus, and establish the proper day for Easter from that point forward.

The name "Dionysius" is the equivalent of the name "Dennis", while Exiguus is not a name but rather a description. It means "the little", as in "Dennis the little". Some have said that Dionysius was short, even a dwarf, based on this adjective to his name. Most probably, it was a self selected title attached by the monk himself to illustrate his humility.

During the course of determining the date of Easter, Dionysius recognized significant weaknesses in the Roman Calendar. He also desired to change the calendar's focal point from the establishment of Rome or the Roman Caesars to that of Jesus. It was Dionysius that introduced B.C./A.D. ("Before Christ"/"Anno Domini") designations. He established our modern calendar. The new calendar received the Pope's name; the Gregorian calendar was born. It replaced the calendar endorsed by the Caesars; the Julian Calendar. The calendar that was to be replaced was created by famed Roman statesman Julius Caesar in an attempt to correct the highly inaccurate Roman calendar of his day. The Gregorian Calendar, which was introduced in 1,582 A.U.C. A.U.C. is the year according to the Julian Calendar. A.U.C. stands for "ab urbe condita", or the year since the founding of Rome. The major triumph of the new Gregorian Calendar was the introduction of leap days, finally creating an acceptable way to adjust our calendars to the solar year.

Dionysius was able to establish an Easter Calendar starting in the Julian year 1,285 A.U.C. Finally, Dionysius renumbered the years beginning with the conception of Jesus Christ, according to his calculations, beginning with the year 1 BCE as the Roman numbering system had no way to indicate a zero. Dionysius' Easter tables began being used in the year 532CE (A.D.), started what is referred to as the Christian Era. **"Unfortunately, the system of dating events in the Christian era which we have inherited was constructed by one Dionysius Exiguus at the beginning of the sixth century. He assumed - wrongly - that the date of Jesus' birth was 753 A.U.C. (ab urbe condita), i.e. 753 years after the founding of the city of Rome. Herod died four years before that, in 749 A.U.C., hence we say that he died in 4 B.C. Actually, if we assume the accuracy of the events described in Matthew 1:16...then the latest sate for the birth of Jesus must be 4 B.C. (the year Herod died), and it may well have been as early as 9 B.C."** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.E. Albright & C.S. Mann, page 23).

POPE  
GREGORY XIII



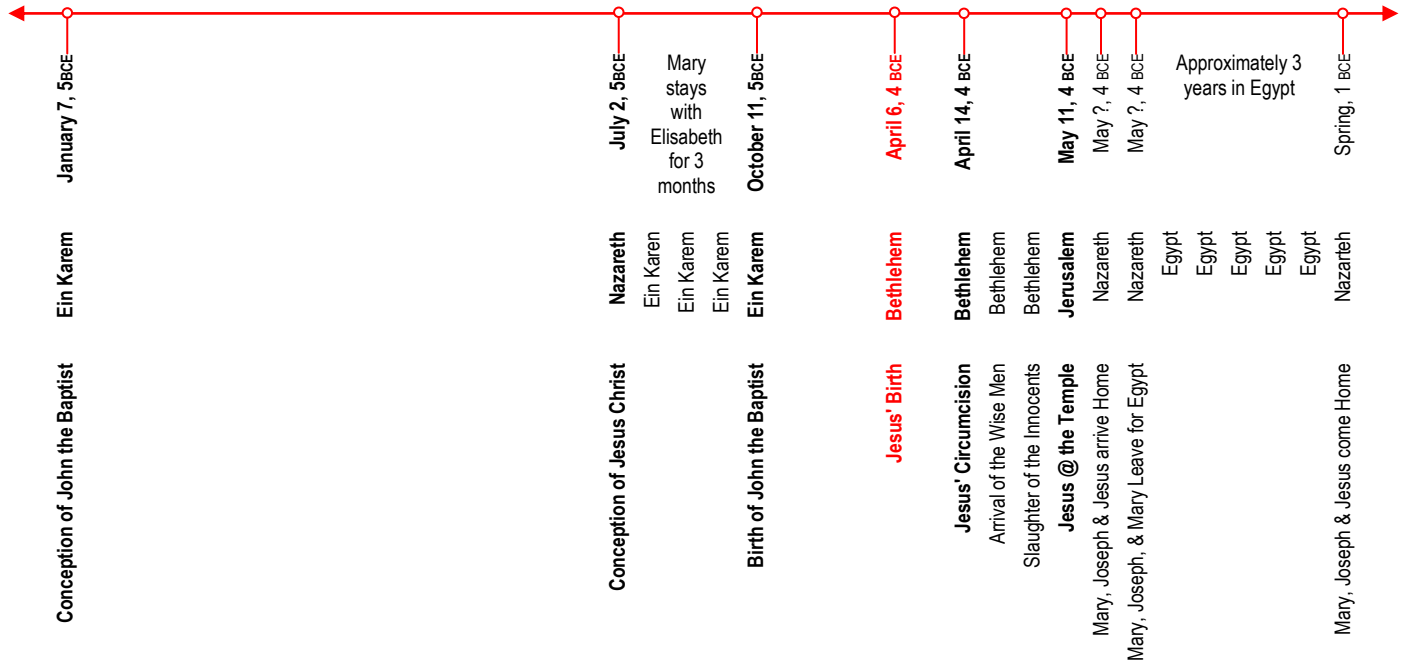
It is widely accepted that Dionysius incorrectly calculated the year of Christ's birth. The records at his disposal required vast speculation, and historians often made mistakes when recording dates. There is also evidence that the society actually lost track of the year for a long period of time, resulting in an actual loss of years in the accounting. This left Dionysius with poor facts to establish a date for the birth of Jesus. Both ancient and modern scholars placed the birth of the Savior, according to the Gregorian Calendar, between 9 and 2 BCE. Some scholars have speculated that the inaccuracy may have stemmed from Dionysius placing the first day of the year in January rather than September. They feel that he based the indicator of the year on the number of elapsed years, rather than noting the date of the current year; and considering the conception to be the moment of birth, rather than the moment of conception. Alternatively, Dionysius may have simply misinterpreted a document listing the names of consuls, for whom the Romans named the year at the time of Christ, and made some minor miscalculation that resulted in the date shift. At any rate, the whole calendar is based on the birth of the Savior, and Dionysius got it wrong.

It is nearly impossible to reconcile Herod's death, the census of Cyrenius, the visit of the Wise Men and the birth of Jesus, at least with any solid facts. **"In treating this topic Dr. Charles F. Deems (The Light of the Nations, p. 28), after giving careful consideration of the estimates, calculations, and assumptions of men who have employed many means in their investigation and reach only discordant results says: 'It is annoying to see learned men use the same apparatus of calculation and reach the most diverse results. It is bewildering to attempt a reconciliation of these varying calculations.'** In an appended note the same author states: 'For example: the birth of our Lord is placed in B.C. 1 by Pearson and Hug; B.C. 2 by Scalinger; B.C. 3 by Baronius and Paulus; B.C. 4 by Bengel, Wieseler, and Greswell; B.C. 5 by Usher and Petavius; B.C. 6 by Strong, Luvin, and Clark; B.C. 7 by Ideler and Sanclemente.'" (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 109). The Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote, **"According to the chronology we are following - and it is the same followed by President J. Rueben Clark, Jr., in Our Lord of the Gospel - Jesus was Born in December 5 B.C., he was circumcised in January of 4B.C., he was presented in the temple in February, 4 B.C., and the family probably returned to Nazareth that same Month. The visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, and the slaughter of the Innocents, also, are all presumed to have been in February 4 B.C. The events incident to them, of course, took place in Bethlehem."** (Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 232). So what dates should we use? Well, modern revelation places the Birth date of the Savior on April 6th. The year, however, is the real question. So here is a breakdown of possibility;

- 1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug
- 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger
- 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus
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- 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark
- 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente

The year preferred for the birth year of the Jesus Christ by this author is 4BCE. Of course, until more information is made available to man, the selection of the proper birth year is at best an educated guess.

## TIME LINE FOR THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH



See also Chapter 2, footnote #1, Chapter 5, footnote #2, Chapter 9, footnote #2, Chapter 13, footnote #1, and Chapter 14, footnote #1.

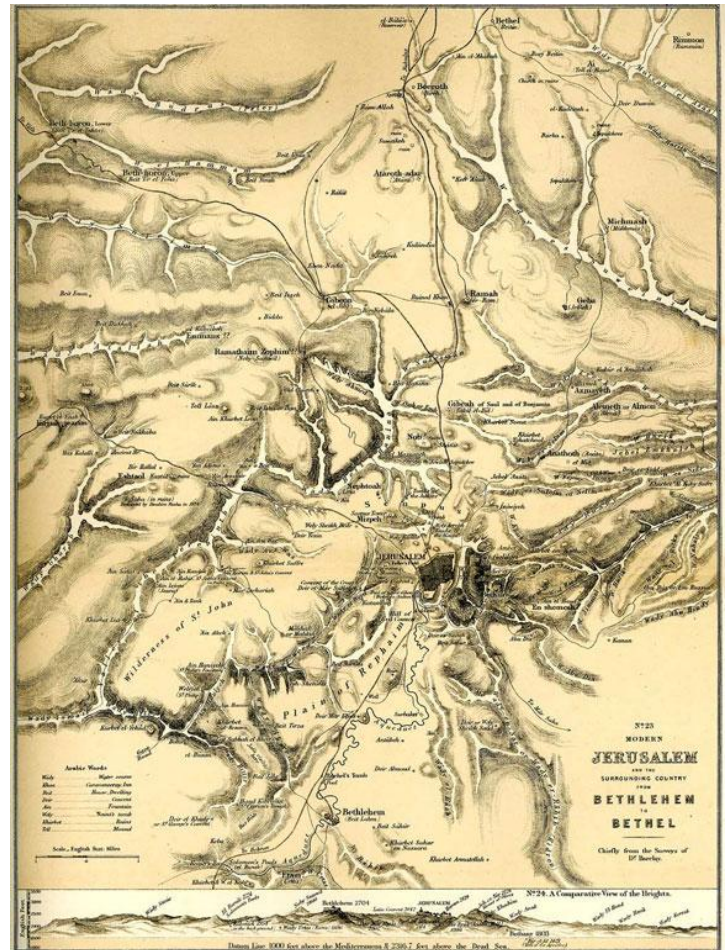
- 2- **Bethlehem** - The Hebrew word "Bet" means "house", while the Hebrew word "Lechem" means "bread". Hence, "Bet-lechem" or "Bethlehem" means "house of bread". Note that Jesus Christ referred to himself as the bread of life, **"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."** (John 6:35). This has striking inference to the bread of the sacrament which signifies his body, and the water of the sacrament which signifies his blood. Together they symbolize the great and final sacrifice of the Savior. His bread and water are the fruits of the Atonement. They represent eternal life and exaltation to those that choose to partake. It is only fitting, and I do not believe by happenstance, that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, the house of bread.

Micah prophesied, **"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."** (Micah 2:5). The "ruler in Israel" is the Messiah, which Micah says will "come forth" from Beth-lehem Ephrathah. The word "Ephrathah" means "fruitful".

Bethlehem has a long history of significance, in spite of the fact that it was a small city. Bethlehem was the burial place of Rachel (Genesis 35:19, 48:7). It was in Bethlehem that Jesse raised his sons, one of whom was David. The prophet Samuel received revelation that a new King was to be anointed in Israel. Samuel journeyed to Bethlehem in search of the new King. There he found young David. Samuel anointed David in Bethlehem to become the next King of Israel (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:1-13, 17:12,15, 20:2,28). David's forefathers came from Bethlehem as well. The site of the ancient city of Bethlehem was home to Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 1:2; Ruth 2:4). Because of all of this, Bethlehem became known as "the City of David". This is significant because David is seen as the progenitor of Israel's Royal Family.

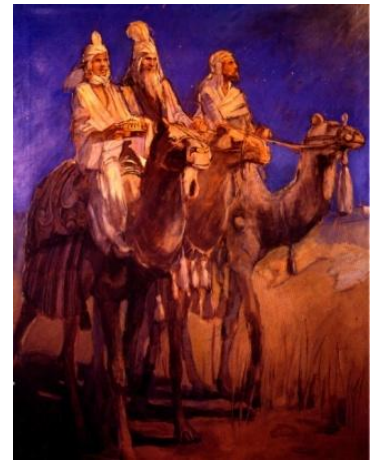


The ancient Israelites believed that the Messiah would come from the House of David. He would have the royal line, and he would be born in Bethlehem. See also the commentary for Bethlehem in Chapter 9, footnote #23, and Chapter 14, footnote #2.





3- **wise men** - The term "wise men" is mysterious by itself. The Bible refers to "Wise Men" in several instances. The Pharaoh of Moses had Wise Men in his court, as found in Exodus 7:11 and Exodus 36:4. Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, also dealt with Pharaoh's "Wise Men", Genesis 41:8. The Book of Ester makes mention of the Persian King's "Wise Men", Ester 1:13 and Ester 6:13. Daniel experienced the "Wise Men" in the King's court of Babylon, Daniel 2:12. In all these cases, the term "Wise Men" is translated from a single word rather than other references in the Bible where the term is translated from two separate words, "wise" and "men". The single word translation seems to reference a class or occupation. The Old Testament translates the term "Wise Men" from the word "חכמים" or "chakam", meaning skillful in a technical sense, learned, administratively wise, or religiously wise. They were in some respects counselors to kings and nobility. The New Testament translates the term "Wise Men" from the Greek word, "μάγος" or "magos". From this translation, we get the term "Magi". The term "magos" was a title given to teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers (someone who foretells things via omens), soothsayers, sorcerers, or others deemed extremely learned or knowledgeable. This title would also be given to astrologers, prophets, and or men who claimed to have divine insight. The Greek word "magos" is said to have been derived from the Hebrew "מג רב" or "rab-mag" which is a magician, or soothsayer.



**Where did the Wise Men come from?** So now comes the theories. We do not know where the "wise men" came from. We know only that they came from the East. This being said, many have researched the people of the East at the time of Jesus' birth and have proposed some interesting theories;

**Theory 1 - Medianites** - The Greek historian Herodotus said, "**Deioces, then, united the Median nation, but this one only, and this he ruled. The Median tribes are as follows: Busae, Parataceni, Struchates, rizonti, Budii, Magi. That is all there is of them.**" (The History: Herodotus, translated by David Greene, page 100). Herodotus suggests that one of the Median tribes was named Magi. The Medians would have indeed come from the East. It would also be interesting that Medianites came to visit the Christ child since Jethro, Moses Father-in-Law, was a Medianite. We know that Jethro held the priesthood, and that his family descended from Abraham. They were a righteous people. As such, they would have had scripture and access to the prophecies of the coming Messiah. It would not be surprising to find that the wise men were righteous men, descended from Jethro, who had been looking for the birth of Jesus and recognized the signs.

Of course, not everyone in Media at the time of Christ maintained the traditions of Abraham, let alone, were looking for the Messiah, "**An account of the worship practiced by the Magi of Media will give us some idea of the peculiarities of the order. Rawlinson says: 'Magism was essentially the worship of the elements, the recognition of fire, air, earth, and water as the only proper objects of human reverence. The Magi held no personal gods, and, therefore, naturally rejected temples, shrines, and images, as tending to encourage the notion that gods existed of a like nature with man; that is, possessing personality - living and intelligent beings. Theirs was a nature worship, but a nature worship of a particular kind. They did not place gods over the different parts of nature, like the Greeks; they did not even personify the powers of nature, like the Hindus; they paid their devotion to the actual material things themselves. Fire, as the most subtle and ethereal principle, and again as the most powerful agent, attracted their highest regards; and on their fire-altars the sacred flame, generally said to have been kindled from heaven, was kept burning uninterrupted from year to year and from age to age by bands of priests, whose special duty it was to see that the sacred spark was never extinguished.'**" (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, pages 331-332).

**Theory 2 - Persian Zoroastrian Priests** - Another Greek historian, Philo, records, "**Among the Persians there is the body of the Magi, who, investigating the works of nature for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the truth...**" (The Works of Philo, Translated by C.D. Yonge, page 689). The word "Magi" is a Latinization of the plural of the Greek word magos (μάγος pl. μάγοι). Many feel that the word Magi is derived from the Old Persian "maguš", which was taken from the Avestan "moyu". Again, the Persian term is a specific occupational title referring to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. Subsequently, many scholars speculate that the wise men were Zoroastrian Priests. This is conjecture; however, not outside of reason. As part of the Zoroastrian religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars, and gained a wide spread reputation for astrology, which was at that time a highly regarded science. Their religious practices and use of astrological sciences caused derivatives of the term Magi to be applied to the occult in general and led to the English term magic. Translated in the King James Version as wise men, the same word is given as sorcerer and sorcery when describing "Elymas the sorcerer" in Acts 13:6-11, and Simon Magus, considered a heretic by the early Church, in Acts 8:9-13.



REMBRANDT: THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Zoroaster was a religious reformer of ancient Persia (now Iran) and the founder of the pre-Islamic religion of Zoroastrianism. Thought to have lived about 300 years before Alexander the Great, Zoroaster (Zarathustra in Greek) had a religious vision when he was about 30 years old, and for the next decade travelled throughout Persia preaching against the established religious authorities. The story goes that he eventually settled in the land of King Vishtaspa, who embraced Zoroaster's teachings and had his people adopt the new religion. Zoroastrianism emphasizes that good and evil are separate entities at war with each other, in the form of Ormuzd (the god of good, creation and truth) and Ahriman (the god of evil destruction and lies), both ultimately descended from the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda. The holy book of Zoroastrianism is the Avesta, which includes the hymns of Zoroaster (The Gathas, from which most of his biographical information comes), religious texts and prayers. Some believe that the Magi were Zoroastrian Priests. "**One of the best dissertations on this subject is a monograph by Dr. Upham who claims a Persian nationality for these Magi. His opinion indorsed by some of the best recent biblical critics.**" (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, pages 332).



The Dress of Persian Nobility

Personally, I find it highly unlikely that the Lord would choose "wise men" who were following the teachings of a false prophet to testify of the Savior. They were idol worshippers. Though there were many cultures that had some varying traditions about a future Savior, they would be unlikely witnesses. "**To suppose they were members of the apostate religion cult of the Magi of ancient Media and Persia is probably false. Rather, it would appear they were true prophets, righteous persons like Simeon, Anna, and the shepherds, to whom Deity revealed that the promised Messiah had been born among men. Obviously they were in possession of ancient prophecies telling of the rise of a new star at his birth. that they did receive revelation for their personal guidance is**

seen from the inspired dream in which they were warned not to return to Herod after they had found and worshipped the Son of Mary." (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 103).

**Theory 3 - Medes Zoroastrian Priests** - The Persians and the Medes were two tribes of a single nation; and the leading tribe, the Medes, came first into history's view. The story of the founding of the Median Empire is only a legend, but must have some shadow of fact behind it. According to legend, the Medes lived quiet lives of peace such as Zoroaster had taught them, dwelling in little farming villages. Even among these simple farm folk, quarrels sometimes arose, which were usually brought for decision to the wisest and most peaceful man of the community. In this capacity, as umpire, Deioces, a peculiarly serious and moderate villager, became noted and honored through all the country, until finally many of the Medes urged him to act as their permanent leader or king. Like the Persians, the Medes are unlikely candidates for the witnesses of the Savior's birth.

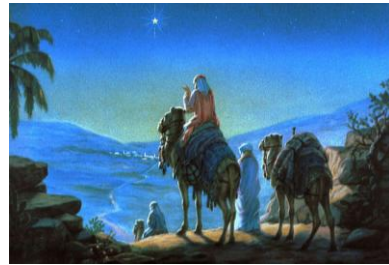


The Dress of Mede Noblemen

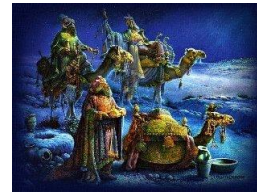


**Theory 4 - Wise Men from Sheba** - Sheba, the Biblical name of the region called in Arabic Saba, of Southern Arabia, including present-day Yemen and the Hadhramaut. It's inhabitants were called Sabaeans or Sabeans. According to some passages in Genesis and 1st Chronicles, Sheba, a grandson of Noah's grandson Joktan, was the ancestor of the Sabaeans. In other passages; however, Sheba was a descendant of Abraham. The Semitic colonization of Ethiopia occurred in the 10th century BCE from Sheba. In that century, the biblical queen of Sheba called in the Muslim tradition of Bilqis.

The Queen of Sheba, according the Bible, visited Solomon after hearing about the fame of his wisdom. In Arabic legend, Solomon and the queen, Bilqis or Balkis, married. Situated along the trade route from India to Africa, Sheba was known as a region of great wealth. Trade between Israel and Sheba is mentioned in 1st Kings. Elements of Sheba's culture, which was at its height between the 9th and 5th century BCE is evidenced by the dam (since collapsed) near Marib, the capital of Sheba, and by the many inscriptions found there. Written in Himyaritic, a Semitic language, the inscribed characters derive from Phoenician writing. Ethiopia conquered Sheba somewhere around 525CE. In 572CE, Sheba became a Persian province and, with the rise of Muhammad, fell under Islamic control and lost its separate identity.



Marco Polo claimed that he was shown the three tombs of the Magi at Saveh south of Tehran in the 1270's. Marco recorded, "In Persia is the city of Saba, from which the Three Magi set out and in this city they are buried, in three very large and beautiful monuments, side by side. And above them there is a square building, beautifully kept. The bodies are still entire, with hair and beard remaining." (The Book of the Million, Marco Polo). Debatably, the first Pope, Constantine, sent his mother Helena to Persia where she records seeing the remains of the three wise men. Conflicting with Marco Polo's date, Queen Helena reported transferred the remains of the three wise men to Milan. Queen Helena died in 330CE. Apparently, the remains Marco Polo saw were different than the remains Queen Helena retrieved. In 1,163CE, the remains of Queen Helena's wise men were transferred to the cathedral of Cologne.



The gifts given by the Magi denote that they heralded from the Arabian peninsula. Sheba, a country in southwest Arabia, is known to have traded gold and jewels with Mediterranean countries. It was also a great source of high quality Frankincense and Myrrh. It was ruled by priest-kings who worshipped the stars.

**Theory 5 - Wise Men from China** - Yet, another account claims that one of the Magi came from China. Liu Shang, the chief astrologer during the Han dynasty, is said to have discovered a new star which he called the "king star." He associated this star with the birth of a great king. In a somewhat mysterious fashion, Liu Shang disappeared from the Imperial court for two years shortly after the star was discovered. Chinese Christians today interpret this to mean that Liu Shang ventured down the Silk Road to Bethlehem.

**Theory 6 - Remnants of the 10 lost Tribes** - So here is a theory I have not seen anywhere else. I believe that the Magi or Wise Men may have been of the blood of Israel. We know that the wise men were righteous men. We know that they followed the spirit. They recognized the star in the heavens, as the star of the Messiah. They must have had access to the Holy Scripture. Were there Israelites in the East? Yes, the 10 tribes were taken captive into Assyria in the East. After their captivity the main group left to the north countries and have since been lost. Even so, there were many Israelites who married or remained in Assyria. Many served in Assyrian courts in various capacities. It is quite possible that the wise men were Israelites, living and serving in foreign lands, who recognized the signs of the Messiah's birth.

**Theory 7 - Chaldean descendant of Daniel** - Similar to the line of thinking in theory 6, the wise men may have been Israelite remnants from the Babylonian captivity. The Chaldeans ruled Babylon during this time. Daniel and his friends served in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Interestingly, here is one author's definition of a Magi. "The Magians were a priestly caste, and the office is supposed to have been hereditary. They uttered prophecies, explained omens, interpreted dreams, and practiced rhabdomancy or divination by rods." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, pages 332). This definition nearly describes Daniel, albeit Daniel did not practice magic, he did draw upon heavens powers to interpret dreams, utter prophecy, and explain the unknown. Daniel could definitely be classified as a Magi serving the Babylonian King. One Bible scholar





wrote, "These 'wise men' or, more properly, magi belonged a numerous and influential order of men. The origin of magism is involved in obscurity. It is thought to have had its beginning among either the Chaldeans or the Assyrians; more probably among the former. Starting in Chaldea, it would naturally make its way to Assyria, Media and the adjoining countries. From Media it was brought into Persia, where it exerted powerful influence in modifying the ancient religious faith of the people. Some profess to trace the magian doctrines to Abraham, who, it is said, if he did not originate them, at least purified them from the errors of Zabaism...After Abraham's time they became corrupt, and were again purified by Zoroaster, who is supposed to been a descendant of the prophet Daniel." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, pages 330-331).

**Were the Wise Men Kings?** The notion that the Magi were kings is an incorrect assumption. It is derived from the belief that their coming was prophesied in several scriptures. They are as follows;

"And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and **kings to the brightness of thy rising.**" (Isaiah 60:3)

"The **kings of Tarshish** and of the isles shall **bring presents: the kings of Sheba** and Seba shall **offer gifts.**" (Psalms 72:10)

"Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall **kings bring presents** unto thee." (Psalms 68:29)

In the 2nd century, the theologian Tertullian remarked that they were regarded as "**almost kings**". While it is true that "**The Magi who came to visit the infant Saviour were no doubt of the better class. The idea, however, that they were kings and three in number is mere imagination, and unsusceptible of proof. They were evidently skilled in knowledge, and were earnest seekers after the new born king.**" (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, pages 332). "**They are presumed to be kings because of the richness of their gifts; it is said they were Gentiles, showing that all nations bowed before the newborn King; it is thought they were masters of some astrological cult that could divine great happenings from the stars. They are even named, identified and described; their ages are given, and the color of their skin; and one can, or could in times past, at least, even view their skulls, crowned with jewels, in a cathedral in Cologne. They are brought to have dealt in magic, to be magicians of a sort, and they have become great heroes of the mystical and unknown.**" (Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 233).

Mankind loves a mystery. And where there is a mystery, mankind tends to drive the story to places of fantasy and grandure. The church of the dark ages houses what they believe to be the remains of the three kings. The relics of the Magi were originally situated at Constantinople, but brought to Milan by Eustorgius I, the city's bishop, in 344CE. The relics of the Magi were taken from Milan by Holy Roman Emperor Fredrick Barbarossa and given to the Archbishop of Cologne, Rainald of Dassel, in 1,164CE. The Three Kings have since attracted a constant stream of pilgrims to Cologne. In the days of Philipp of Heinsberg, the shrine of the three magi was built. This was told by some eyewitnesses who were present when the three magi were put into the shrine. Parts of the shrine were designed by the famous medieval goldsmith Nicholas of Verdun, who began work on it in 1180CE or 1181CE. It has elaborate gold sculptures of the prophets and apostles, and scenes from the life of Christ. The shrine was completed around 1,225CE. Around 1,199CE, King Otto gave three golden crowns made for the three wise men as a present to the church of Cologne. Because of the importance of the shrine and the cathedral for the later development of the city, the Coat of Arms of Cologne still shows these three crowns symbolizing the Three Kings. Construction of the present Cologne Cathedral was begun in 1,248CE to house these important relics. The cathedral took 632 years to complete and is now the largest Gothic church in northern Europe. On July 20, 1,864CE, the shrine was opened, and remains of the Three Kings and the coins of Philip I, Archbishop of Cologne were discovered. An eyewitness report reads:



"In a special compartment of the shrine now there showed - along with remains of ancient old rotten or moulded bandages, most likely byssus, besides pieces of aromatic resins and similar substances - numerous bones of three persons, which under the guidance of several present experts could be assembled into nearly complete bodies: the one in his early youth, the second in his early manhood, the third was rather aged. Two coins, bracteates made of silver and only one side striken, were adjoined; one, provably from the days of Philipps von Heinsberg, displayed a church, the other showed a cross, accompanied by the sword of jurisdiction, and the crosier (bishop's crook) on either side."

Even so, the likelihood that the relic contains the actual remains of the wise men is remote at best.

**How many "Wise Men" were there, and what were their names?**

The names of the Magi are as uncertain as is their number. We do not know how many actually came to Bethlehem. An Oriental tradition says that there were 12. There are traditions of 7 and 5, but most common is three. Probably because there were three gifts. Among the Western, world there were three wise men with traditional names, first used by Origen (died 254CE), as follows;

1. Gaspar (a White European Scholar, old with a white beard)
2. Melchior (a Black African Scholar, young and beardless)
3. Balthasar (a Asian Scholar, middle aged with a black beard)

There are other traditions for the names of the Wise Men. The Greeks call them Apellius, Amerius, and Damascus. Here are some other examples;

Syrian	Armenians	Persian	Ethiopian	Hebrew
Larvandad	Kagbha	Horizdah	Hor	Galgalat
Hormisdas	Badadilma	Yazdegerd	Basanater	Malgalat
Gushnasaph	Badadakharida	Perozdh	Karsudan	Sarachin



ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
BY BARTOLOME ESTEBAN MURRILLO

Passing over the purely legendary notion that they represented the three families which are descended from Noah, it appears they all came from "the east". East of Palestine, only ancient Media, Persia, Assyria, and Babylonia had a Magi priests at the time of the birth of Christ. From some such part of the Parthian Empire, the Magi came. They probably crossed the Syrian Desert, lying between the Euphrates and Syria, reached either Haleb (Aleppo) or Tudmor (Palmyra), and journeyed on to Damascus and southward, by what is now the great Mecca route (darb elhaj, "the pilgrim's way"), keeping the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan to their west till they crossed the ford near Jericho. We have no tradition of the precise country or countries meant by the phrase "the east".

## The Trade Routes from Persia & The Possible Route of the Magi



From Persia, whence the Magi are supposed to have come, to Jerusalem was a journey of between 1,000 and 1,200 miles. Such a distance may have taken any time between six and twelve months by camel. Besides the time of travel, there were probably many weeks of preparation. Such a trip would not have been taken on a whim.

- 4- **The East** - The land of the East would have been any land east of Palestine. It could have been Chaldea, Assyria, Sheba, Persia, Media, and yes even China. An apocryphal work records,

**Apocryphal Writing:** "(Chapter 15:1-2) Then Joseph was preparing to go away, because there arose a great disorder in Bethlehem by the coming of some wise men from the east, Who said, Where is the king of the Jews born? (2) For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." (The Protevangelion 15:1-2)

The east has some interesting symbolic meanings that may or may not have application here. East is the direction of birth and rebirth, childhood, youth, happiness and energy. The sun rises in the east, and dispels the darkness. Consequently, the East is a symbol of the Son of God, who will conquer all evil. Many religious ceremonies, historically, have been conducted facing east, a symbolic act of turning towards God. Even the Angel Moroni on top of the latter day temples follow this symbolism as he faces the East looking forward to the return of the Messiah. The east is also the direction in which home lies. Taken as a cultural metaphor, the east becomes the cradle of civilization, the direction of ancient knowledge and wisdom. East is the direction of origins, mysteries and wonders, the home of the light, the source of life, eternal youth, immortality and divinity.

- 5- **Jerusalem** - The wise men found themselves in Jerusalem. One might ask, why didn't they find their way to Bethlehem. It should be noted that Bethlehem was so close to Jerusalem a modern city planner might classify it as a suburb. Of course, I don't think the ancients classified things quite the way we do. Bethlehem was only 4 1/2 miles from Jerusalem. Some circles place the ancient cities slightly further apart at 5 miles. I would imagine that one could follow a star to a general location. Pinpointing an exact local via a star might be more difficult. The Wise Men arrived. They followed the star, and it led them to the vicinity of Jerusalem.

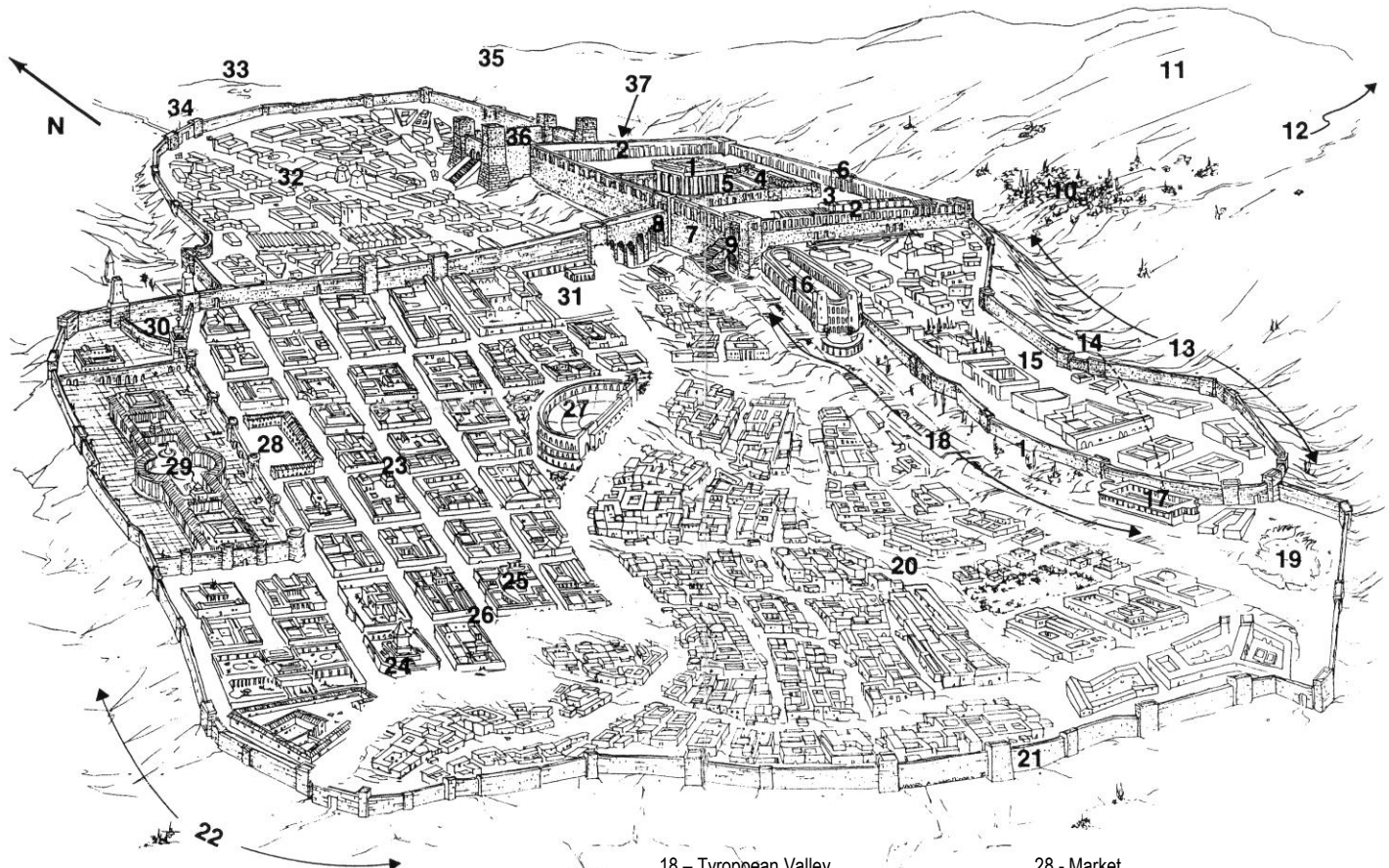
There is some question as to where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were when the Wise Men arrived. Luke records that the Holy Family left to Nazareth after Jesus was presented at the Temple and his mother submitted to ritual purification 40 days after Jesus' birth as required by the Law. From Nazareth, we learn that they flee to Egypt. **"No reason is given why Joseph took his family the 180 miles or so - on foot, by donkey, or however - from Bethlehem to Nazareth and back. Perhaps they had decided to live in the land of their ancestors, near the sacred events that already had become so much a part of their being. Their brief return visit in Nazareth may have been to close the carpentry shop and to take leave of friends and loved ones."** (Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 232). It is presumed that the wise men visited



Jesus in Bethlehem within the 40 day window between Jesus' birth and the presentation at the temple. However, this is problematic given the fact that Mary made an offering of the poor for her purification, 40 days after the birth. Had she received the gifts from the wise men, she would have given the typical offering.

The wise men likely visited Herod the Great in his palace located on the top of the Hinnom Valley.

# The City of Jerusalem

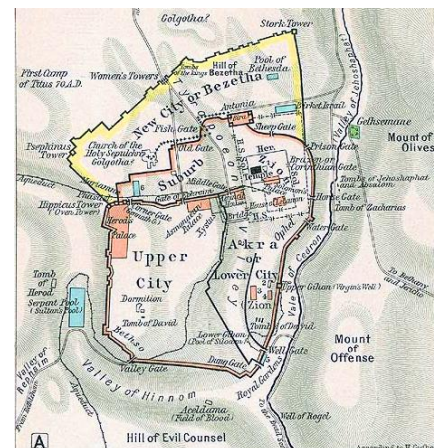


- 1 – The Temple of Herod
- 2 – Solomon's Porches
- 3 – Court of the Gentiles
- 4 – Court of the Women
- 5 – Court of the Levites
- 6 – Golden Gate
- 7 – Site of Modern Wailing Wall
- 8 – Wilson's Arch
- 9 – Robinson's Arch

- 10 – Garden of Gethsemane
- 11 – Mount of Olives
- 12 – Road to Bethphage & Bethany
- 13 – Kidron Valley
- 14 – Gihon Spring
- 15 – Mount Ophel (David's City)
- 16 – Herod's Hippodrome
- 17 – Pool of Siloam
- 18 to 17 – Hezekiah's tunnel

- 18 – Tyropoean Valley
- 19 – King's Dale
- 20 – Lower City (poor district)
- 21 – Wall added by Agrippa (44 AD)
- 22 – Hinnom Valley (Gehenna)
- 23 – Mt. Zion and Upper City (rich district)
- 24 – David's Tomb (traditional site)
- 25 – Palace of Caiaphas
- 26 – The Upper Room
- 27 - Amphitheater

- 28 - Market
- 29 – Herod's Palace
- 30 – The Citadel
- 31 – Hasmonean Palace
- 32 – New City
- 33 – Golgotha (Gordon's Calvary)
- 34 – Site of Garden Tomb
- 35 – Mt. Scopus
- 36 – Antonia Fortress
- 37 – Pool of Bethesda (North of Temple)



See also the commentary for Jerusalem in Chapter 13, footnote #5.



- 6- **King of the Jews** - If the record is correct, the Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem and started to ask where they might find the "King of the Jews". The record does not state who they asked, presumably they were approaching people to seek direction? This must have unnerved Herod. It should be remembered that Herod killed his favorite wife because he believed she was part of a clandestine plan to overthrow him. He didn't wait to properly investigate, impulsively executed her, and then found that she was innocent. He executed several of his own sons for the same reason. He was paranoid. He worried about losing his power and authority. Here enters the Magi, advisers to Kings, into Herod's city. Typically, it would have been a honor to Herod's kingship to have such men visit his city. It would have laid claim to his legitimacy. In a twisted turn of events, the magi are asking the citizens of the paranoid king where the "real" King of the Jews could be found. One could only imagine the thoughts that went through his twisted mind.

The Israelites have long since referred to the Messiah as a King. Here are a few examples;

**"And the Lord said: Blessed is he through whose seed Messiah shall come; for he saith—I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity; whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall; wherefore, blessed are they of whom I have spoken, for they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy." (Moses 7:53)**

**"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)**

**"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." (Jeremiah 23:5)**

**"For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words." (2<sup>nd</sup> Nephi 10:14) (remember that the Nephites are Israelites)**

**"Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men." (Alma 5:50)**

- 7- **his star** - The Star the Wise Men followed has long since been known as the Star of Bethlehem. I prefer Matthew's choice of words, "his star". It was the Star set in the heavens to announce the Birth of Jesus. The word "star" is translated from the Greek word "ἀστήρ" or "aster" which has no other translation other than "star". The Old Testament uses the word "כוכב" or "kawkab" for the term star, which has a broader definition. In addition to the literal translation star, the term can symbolically mean "God's Omniscience", "numerous progeny", "personification", "limitlessness", "divine power", "divine announcement" and "Glory". It was a common practice among the Jews of the New Testament to look to the stars for insight and direction with their lives. It was an accepted belief that longevity, fertility, and sustenance depended not on a person's merit but rather the stars. In the case of the Star of Bethlehem, most consider the star to be a literal translation as well as a literal occurrence verses some sort of symbolic representation. The Book of Mormon records, **"And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word."** (3<sup>rd</sup> Nephi 1:21).



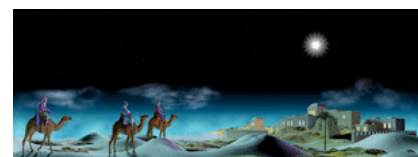
The Hebrews have long since understood the appearance of a new star as a symbol of divine birth. The Midrash records that a bright new star appeared in the east at the birth of Abraham (Sefer Yashar Noah 18a-19a). In the revolt against Rome in 135CE the Jewish rebel leader Bar Koziba was nicknamed "Bar Kowkab" or "son of the star", because many felt he was the promised Messiah. The significance of the star in Matthew 2:2 has to do with a prophecy hundreds of years old surrounding the coming of the Promised Messiah. The Star was an anticipated sign of the Messiah. Balaam prophesied, **"I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."** (Numbers 24:17). The Jews, for many centuries, looked to this verse as a literal prophecy that a star would appear prior to the coming of the Messiah. The Book of Mormon prophesies, **"And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you."** (Helaman 14:5).

There are some interesting similarities between the birth of Jesus and the birth of father Abraham. There are several apocryphal works that record that there were signs in the heavens at Abraham's birth. **"While some of the stories have Abraham's birth declared by the appearance of a star that swallows up four other stars, the Ophica has his birth heralded by the appearance of a comet."** (Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham, compiled by John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, John Gee, page 13). One account records that the wise men of Nimrod recognized the signs in the heaven and interpreted them. It says, **"The sages tell that when our forefather Abraham was born a star appeared, which swallowed up four other stars from the four sides of heavens. When the astrologers of Nimrod saw this they forthwith went to Nimrod and said, "Nimrod, of a certainty there is born to-day a lad who is destined to inherit both this world and the world to come." (Chronicles of Jerahmeel 34:1).** The Book of Jasher offers a very similar record regarding Abraham's star. Jasher says, **"And when all the wise men and conjurers went out from the house of Terah, they lifted up their eyes toward heaven that night to look at the stars, and they saw, and behold one very large star came from the east and ran in the heavens, and he swallowed up the four stars from the four sides of the heavens."** (The Book of Jasher 8:2).

When we hear the term astrologer or conjuror, we rightfully think false prophet or evil. Reading stars is not always a righteous act. Philo records, **"Then those who inhabited the earth began to observe the stars and started to reckon by them and to make predictions and to have their sons and daughters pass through the fire. But Serug and his sons did not act as these did."** (Pseudo-Philo 4:16). So what is the difference between what the people of Serug's day did and the Wise Men of Abraham and Jesus. The difference is prophecy. Where God has revealed His signs in heaven, we find truth and righteousness. Where men seek to find signs to justify themselves, we find wickedness. We should always seek the true messengers from God.

From the Scriptures, there are numerous facts about the Star of Bethlehem that may help us understand its very nature.

1. **It signified that the Messiah had been born.** (Matthew 2:2, Numbers 24:17)
2. **It signified kingship.** (Matthew 2:2, Matthew 2:6)
3. **It had a connection with the Jewish nation.** (Multiple Jewish Prophecies)
4. **It rose in the east, like other stars.** (Matthew 2:2)
5. **It appeared at a precise time.** (Matthew 2:7)



6. **Herod didn't know when it appeared, indicating that the common man might not have been aware of the star. The new star might not have been as spectacular as most imagine. (Matthew 2:7)**
7. **It endured over time; however, it may not have been constant. (Matthew 2:9-10)**
8. **It was ahead of the Magi as they went south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:9)**
9. **It stopped over Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:9)**

Many scholars have tried to determine what the "Star" really was. There are numerous theories. Knowing the above listed qualifications, we are in a position to disqualify most astronomical phenomena as being the Star. Remember that if any of the Biblical qualifications of the Star are absent, then the phenomenon we are examining may be interesting, but isn't likely the Biblical Star. The most popular theories as to what the star of Bethlehem was are listed below.

1. **Nova** - A nova is an exploding star. Novas appear suddenly at a point in time, endures over time, rises in the east like other stars and can be spectacular. However, none appear in the ancient records for the time period of 9<sup>BCE</sup> to 1<sup>BCE</sup>. A nova is also an obvious thing. Many of us have been to locations, such as high mountains or the desert, far from modern artificial light (which astronomers call "light pollution"). We marvel at how clearly the heavens can be seen under such conditions. Unless weather interfered, Jerusalem was like that every night, and common people were far more familiar than are we with the appearance of the night sky. If a nova suddenly appeared, almost everyone would know about it. Herod would not have had to ask the Magi when it appeared. If the Star was a real astronomical event, it was very likely not a nova.



2. **Comet** - Comets can travel through a background of stars at the rate of 1 or 2 degrees per day. They may be visible to the naked eye for 100 days or so. Now a journey to Judea from Persia would take the Wise Men about 6 weeks to 12 months, depending on where they started. Comets would thus be visible long enough for the journey itself. But none last 2 years, and no comets were recorded for the prime dates of 3<sup>BCE</sup> and 2<sup>BCE</sup>. Halley's comet flared in the skies in 11<sup>BCE</sup>. Another comet swept across the heavens in 4<sup>BCE</sup>. So comets fade as a possibility for the Star. A comet is an object which has a very large orbit about the Sun, an orbit of many years duration. You may be familiar with Halley's Comet. Halley's, like many comets, is a block of ice, in Halley's case a few miles across. It orbits the Sun in a 75.5 year circuit, and like all comets, it is easily tracked using Kepler's equations. Comets do rise in the east and endure over time. But there are several problems with the comet hypothesis.



The first problem is sociological. At this time in history (and all the way into the middle ages), comets were regarded as omens of doom and destruction, the very opposite of good tidings. This was in part because of comet behavior. They were perceived in ancient times to break into the sky ignoring the highly ordered and repetitive clockwork movement of the heavens. The Almighty could have chosen to use an ominous sign for the birth of Christ. Presumably, He can do whatever He likes. But if the purpose of the Star was to communicate something joyful to man, a comet seems an unlikely choice.

A bigger problem is that there do not appear to have been any comets in 3<sup>BCE</sup> or 2<sup>BCE</sup>. Several civilizations maintained records of such phenomena, notably the Chinese. These records have been preserved to the present day, and no comets are recorded for these years.

Finally, comets are obvious things. Anyone could and would have seen a comet. Herod would not have needed to ask the Magi when such a thing appeared. The Biblical Star was very likely not a comet.



3. **Meteor** - A meteor is a small fragment of material or even celestial dust which enters Earth's atmosphere at great speed glowing brightly as its outer layers vaporize. While often a physically small thing, a "shooting star" can be beautiful viewed from Earth and could be a dramatic means of making an announcement in the heavens. But such a sign would fail most of the nine tests. Most obvious is the fact that shooting stars don't rise in the east like other stars, they do "shoot" across the sky. Because they display suddenly, only once and for mere moments as they burn up in the Earth's atmosphere, it is not obvious how the Magi could form associations with kingship, birth, the Jews, the Messiah's birthplace and all. And meteors don't endure long enough to satisfy the Biblical criteria. The Star was very likely not a meteor.



4. **Lunar eclipse** - Josephus records that Herod died shortly after an eclipse of the Moon seen at Jericho, and sometime before the Feast of Passover. It is this point which has caused much historical confusion, as we have to select between four Lunar eclipses. There is one key piece of evidence which is often overlooked. The Jewish historian Josephus, records that there was a Jewish holiday celebrating Herod's death on 2nd day of the month Shebat. Significantly, this date is in accord with only one of those 4 eclipses, namely the one on 9th Jan, 1<sup>BCE</sup>. The 2nd Shebat date fell just 15 days after that eclipse. This means that Herod died 24th January 1<sup>BCE</sup>. Consequently, the Christmas star must have appeared throughout 3<sup>BCE</sup> and 2<sup>BCE</sup>. This accords with the census completed by late 3<sup>BCE</sup>. An eclipse would not be confused with a star, even anciently.



5. **Conjunction of Planets** - The star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn (7<sup>BCE</sup>), or of Jupiter and Venus (6<sup>BCE</sup>). The star was just above the horizon but hidden by the brightness of the sun. In the opinion of Konradin Ferrari d'Occhieppo it was more than just a triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7<sup>BCE</sup>. The star Jupiter (royal star in Babylon) had met Saturn in the sign of Pisces (which lays in the western sky) for the first time in 854 years. Jupiter is the name of the largest planet of our solar system. Jupiter has been known from ages-old to the present as the King Planet. This greatest of planets is a "gas giant," approximately eleven times the size of Earth



and over 300 times more massive. It circles the Sun far beyond Earth, in an orbit of about twelve years duration. In ancient times, planets like Jupiter were considered "wandering stars." Since humans have assigned kingly qualities to this giant wanderer for dozens of centuries, might it have something to do with our Star announcing the birth of a king? That will be our working theory.



It's not enough to have a kingly name and reputation, of course. To be Matthew's Star, Jupiter as viewed from Earth would have to do peculiar things. More precisely, as considered by a magus viewing from the Middle East during the years 3BCE and 2BCE, Jupiter's movements would have to satisfy all nine identifying characteristics of the Star. In September of 3BCE at the time of the Jewish New Year, Rosh ha-Shanah, Jupiter began to do just that.

A magis watching Jupiter that September saw two objects moving so close that they appeared to touch. This close approach of celestial bodies is called a 'conjunction.' Our Middle Eastern viewer saw Jupiter coming into a close conjunction with the star, Regulus. Regulus takes its name from the word root which yields our word 'regal.' The Babylonians called Regulus Sharu, which means 'king.' The Romans called Regulus Rex, which means 'king.' So to start things, at the beginning of the new Jewish year, the Planet of Kings met the Star of Kings. This conjunction may have indicated kingship in a forceful way to a Babylonian magis (satisfying one qualification for the Star), but would it have been significant enough to indicate a Messiah?



Probably not. Jupiter glides slowly past Regulus about every 12 years. Let's assume our magis enjoyed a 50-year career, say from age 20 to age 70. We don't know how old the Magi were, but if our man was in the second half of his career, he might have seen such a pass two or three times before. Jupiter's orbit wobbles relative to Regulus, so not every conjunction is as close as the one he saw in 3BCE. Perhaps our Magis recorded this event with some interest, but it is hard to imagine great excitement. Not from this alone. But, of course, there is more.

The planets move against the field of fixed stars. From Earth, they appear to be "active." For example, when you watch Jupiter each night for several weeks, you would see that it moves eastward through the starry field. Each night Jupiter rises in the east (satisfying a second Star qualification). Each night it appears to be slightly farther east in the field of fixed stars. All of the planets move like this.

But the wandering stars exhibit another, stranger motion. Periodically, it appears to reverse course and move backward through the other stars. This may seem odd, but the reason is simple enough: we watch the planets from a moving platform—Earth—hurtling around the Sun in its own orbit. When you pass a car on the freeway, it appears to go backward as it drops behind. For similar reasons, when the Earth in its orbit swings past another planet, that planet appears to move backward against the starry field. Astronomers call this optical effect retrograde motion.



In 3/2BCE, Jupiter's retrograde wandering would have called for our magis' full attention. After Jupiter and Regulus had their kingly encounter, Jupiter continued on its path through the star field. But then it entered retrograde. It "changed its mind" and headed back to Regulus for a second conjunction. After this second pass, it reversed course again for yet a third rendezvous with Regulus, a triple conjunction. A triple pass like this is more rare. Over a period of months, our watching magis would have seen the Planet of Kings dance out a halo above the Star of Kings. A coronation. The big problem is that the Magi would not have classified this as a New Star.

6. **Supernatural act of God** - Only a miraculous phenomenon could have been the Star of Bethlehem. It was like the miraculous pillar of fire which stood in the camp by night during Israel's Exodus (Exodus 13:21), or to the "brightness of God" which shone round about the shepherds (Luke 2:9), or to "the light from heaven" which shone around about the stricken Saul (Acts 9:3). There is one more important detail. Matthew 2:9-11 implies that something was marking the very house that Jesus had been living in for arguably months. The planets and stars can never mark a single building. What is the answer to this Biblical conundrum? Throughout the Scriptures, God has consistently appeared to His servants in what has often been called the "Shekinah" or "Manifestation of Glory". The Children of Israel were guided from Egypt to Canaan by the 'Pillar of cloud by day, and a Pillar of fire by night' (see Ex.13:21.22 etc). In Genesis, it is described as looking like a twisting blazing, shining object at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. The "Shekinah" out of which God spoke to the patriarch Job appeared as a whirlwind of bright and shining cloud. Abraham saw this cloud of Glory at sunset outside his tent as a burning smoking light. Ezekiel witnessed a "Shekinah", in which God dwelt as a whirlwind of fire enfolding itself.

There are several apocryphal works that mention the star of the Messiah. I would remind the reader that apocryphal works can add to our scriptural study, but must be done with the spirit's guidance. Discerning the truth from the additions of men is often necessary when reviewing such works. That being understood, here are some examples as they pertain to the star that guided the wise men.

**Apocryphal Writing:** "They answered him, We saw an extraordinary large star shining among the stars of heaven, and so out-shined all the other stars, as that they became not visible, and we knew thereby that a great king was born in Israel, and therefore we are come to worship him." (The Protoevangelion of James, Chapter 15, verse 7)

**Apocryphal Writing:** "So the wise men went forth, and behold, the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over the cave where the young child was with Mary his mother." (The Protevangelion of Thomas, Chapter XV, verse 7)

**Apocryphal Writing:** “And at the same time there appeared to them an angel in the form of that star which had before been their guide in their journey; the light of which they followed till they returned into their own country.” (The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ, Chapter 3, Verse 3)

The star was symbolic of the light of Christ: “After long ages of darkness, says the Testament of Judah, an early Christian text discovered among the Qumran scrolls in 1952, ‘shall a star rise to you from Jacob in peace, and a man shall arise like the sun of righteousness, ... and the heavens shall be opened to him.’” (Ensign, “Birth of the Messiah”, Paul Thomas Smith, December 1997). The star appeared in the dark night sky. It was a light or beckon in darkness. The star symbolizes Jesus, or his light, as he dispels darkness and provides truth. He opened the heavens, providing the truths of the covenant to man. “Then shall the Lord raise up a new priest,” states the Testament of Levi, another early Christian text. “His Star shall rise in heaven as of a king ... and the heavens shall be opened.” (Ensign, “Birth of the Messiah”, Paul Thomas Smith, December 1997).

8 - Herod - "Historically, there is nothing in the least improbable about magi traveling from Babylon west, or indeed anywhere else in the Mediterranean world. They would find welcome audiences anywhere, from royal courts to market places. Consultation of magi by kings and prominent persons is well attested. With 'messianism' of one kind and another in the air almost everywhere - and Herod cannot possibly have been ignorant of the hopes being entertained at Qumran - then the news of magi coming to seek a king would guarantee Herod's calling for them. Herod was constantly concerned with real or imagined usurpers." (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 15). This passage really sums up the necessary details about Herod the Great in relation to the Wise Men. Here they are broken down;



1. Herod the Great was the King of Judea, including Jerusalem.
2. He was paranoid about rebellions and threats to his throne.
3. Rumors about a Messiah were common. Most viewed the Messiah as a Saving King.
4. Herod heard about the Magi coming to his town looking for a New King.
5. This would have been threatening and worrisome to Herod.

Not included in the above summary, but included in other sections of this commentary, are the following facts;

6. Herod was a ruthless killer who killed his beloved with several children due to suspicions of rebellion against him.
7. Herod was a vassal king under Caesar and was responsible for maintaining peace.
8. Herod was a cunning ruler who was willing to use lying and deceit to get his way.

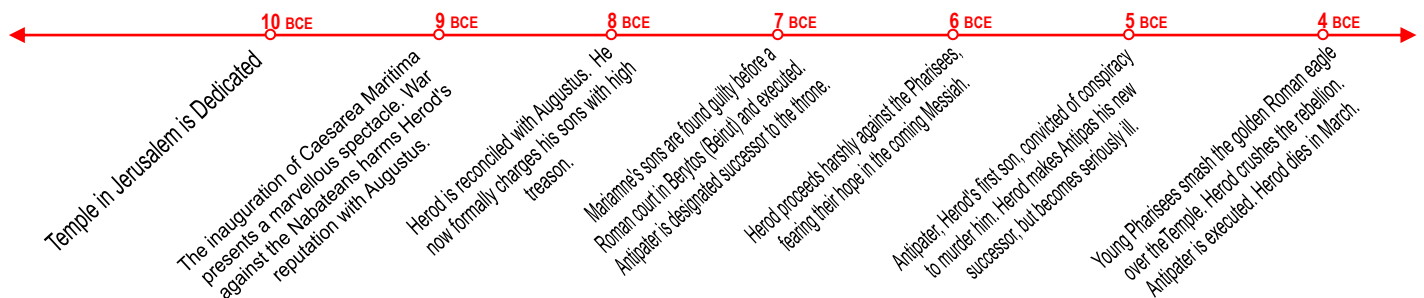
Details about Herod and his life can be found in Chapter 2, footnote #2.

9- troubled - Herod, and all of Jerusalem, was troubled. The term troubled is translated from the Greek word “ταράσσω” or “tarasso” meaning “agitated”, “anxious”, “distressed”, “to strike one’s spirit with fear and dread”, or “to make restless”. It is understandable that Herod would be troubled. He was a paranoid man, fearful of losing his throne. Herod's actions could easily be guessed: identify the new king, and kill him. And as the story proceeds, that is Herod's direction. In fact, when he could not identify the new king, he decided to kill all the children. He assumed that if he killed them all...well, mission accomplished. But was all of Jerusalem troubled as well? Why would Jerusalem be troubled over the news? History records that the Jews did not like Herod, and followed him only out of fear. Why would news of a “New King” trouble Jerusalem.

I believe that the answer lies in several facts;

- i. The people of Jerusalem were afraid that rebellion, or even a perceived threat of rebellion, might occur. The past dictated that there could be severe consequences for them should this occur. In 6BCE, Herod executed several Pharisaic leaders who had announced that the birth of the Messiah would mean the end of Herod's rule. Then, in 4BCE, when young Pharisaic Torah-students smashed the golden Roman eagle over the main entrance of Herod's Temple, he had 40 of them, along with two of their professors, burned alive. (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 17, Chapter 2, Chapter 4 verse 6). Meanwhile, Herod found willing allies among the Sadducees, who re-emerged to reclaim the High Priesthood and challenge Pharisaic pre-eminence. Somewhere in this, probably 4BCE, the Magi's showed up and brought the whole subject of a Messiah to the forefront, again. That surely made some people nervous.
- ii. The leadership of Jerusalem was power hungry as well. They had developed a political system within the church. Rome and Herod allowed the Judean church structure to exist and function within itself. A new king might ruin all of that. Not everyone was in this category, but there were surely a group that would have been troubled by change.
- iii. A new king might make things worse. New isn't always better, at least from the world's perspective.

## TIMELINE FOR HEROD AND JERUSALEM AROUND THE MAGI'S VISIT





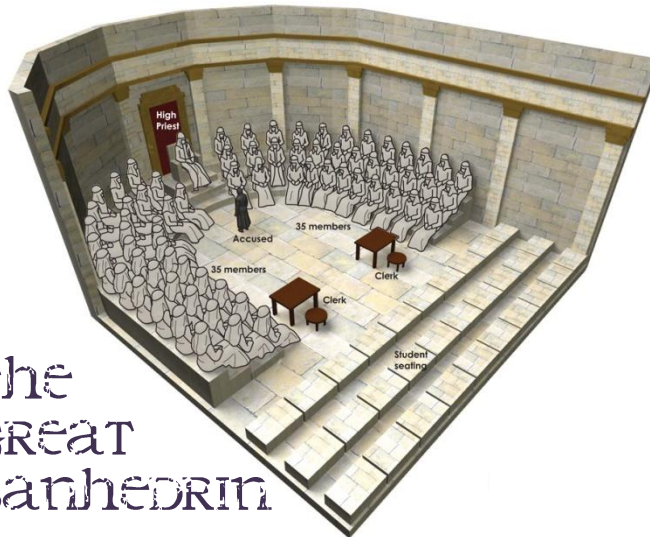
If Jesus were born in 4BCE, and the Magi arrived near the time of His birth, then you can imagine that all of Jerusalem would have been sacred at any talk of a Messiah. Pharisees were executed in 6BCE for that kind of talk. Yes, the news would have been troubling. See also the commentary in Chapter 3, footnote #18.

**10- priests** - The Chief Priests in first century Palestine were those selected to sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone as a member of the ruling council of Jews. There was no separation between church and state, in Jewish law, and the Romans allowed vassal states some autonomy so long as taxes and loyalty to Rome were maintained. The priests at the Temple in Jerusalem not only officiated over the religious life of the Jews, they were also rulers and judges. Herod, who was himself a pawn of Rome, had his own pawns installed in the Jewish Priesthood. He executed members of the Great Sanhedrin, of the Chief Priests, and made room for men loyal to him. By the first century, the election of the High Priest was more political than religious. The Romans wanted the Priesthood to support their occupation of Judea, and Herod made sure that Rome's desires were carried out. However, it would be unfair to categorize all of the Priesthood as sympathetic to Rome. Some did support rebellion against Rome, but those at the highest levels were undoubtedly in Rome's back pocket. To better understand the term Chief Priest, one needs to understand the Sanhedrin and the political parties that staffed it.

**Sanhedrin** - The word "Sanhedrin" is a Greek word, 'συνέδριον', meaning "a council-chamber". The Great Sanhedrin was the governing council of the Jews. It is said that the Sanhedrin originated at the time of Moses, when he set apart 70 elders to judge the people. This original council was called the 'Mishna'. The 'Mishna' disappeared after the children of Israel entered Palestine. After the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, there was a need to restore and define the somewhat lost religion. History is vague; however, sometime between the return of the Jews and the time of Herod the Great, the Jewish council was reinstated with the purpose of judging and ruling over the people. The Sanhedrin consisted of priests, scribes, lawyers, and those who were well schooled in Jewish law and ritual. There are many that believe a member of the council served for life. The council consisted of 71 men who sat in a semi-half-circle. The Great Sanhedrin met on fixed occasions and was presided over by two officials (zugot or the "pair"), the nasi and the av bet din. The Sanhedrin met in the Gazzith (the Chamber of Hewn Stone), a grand hall located on the southeast corner of the temple court, right off the area dedicated for sacrifice. The Great Sanhedrin might be the equivalent of our Supreme Court. The Talmud makes mention of lesser Sanhedrins organized in each major city within Judea. These lesser Sanhedrins consisted of only 23 men.



a lesser sanhedrin



The GREAT sanhedrin

The Jewish high court of justice consisted of 71 men, one of which was the leader of the group: the High Priest. The council could decide almost any fate for the Jewish people - except the death penalty, which was decided by the Romans. The court was located within the Chamber of Hewn Stone inside Herod's Temple.

**Av Bet Din** - The Chief of the Court. He was the High Priest of the Priesthood and the Sanhedrin.

**Nasi** - The Prince. This position was created in 191BCE because of a lack of confidence in the Av Bet Din. The Nasi is not an official member of the Sanhedrin. He is the Judge over criminal trials.

**The Sadducees** - The Sadducees were a religious party or school of thought in Judea at the time of Christ. Between the Pharisees and Sadducees lie the beliefs or affiliations of most of the Jews of the time of Christ. Similar to the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States political system, these two parties dominated even though there were smaller factions with strong beliefs. The Sadducees and Pharisees were religious groups; however, they existed in a state where politics and religious beliefs were spun together. The Sadducees rejected the truthfulness of oral laws and traditions. They believed only in written law, rejecting all oral traditions. Their name is said to have been derived from Zadok, the great High Priest under King David. The Hebrew word for Sadducee is 'Tzedoq', meaning 'follower of Zadok'. They are sometimes referred to as Zadokites. The Sons of Zadok were a class of Priests and Temple officials who represented the upper class of society. There are some that feel the name "Sadducee" actually comes from the Hebrew word 'zedekah' meaning 'righteous'. The thought that they were somehow more righteous than everyone else, went to their head. As time went on, they became an aristocratic class. The Sadducees were known for the following beliefs;

1. The Sadducees rejected any belief that they could not fully justify by the written law.
2. The Sadducees rejected the doctrine of man's resurrection after death, saying it could not be proven from the Torah.
3. The Sadducees denied the existence of spirits or angels.
4. The Sadducees denied that there was such a thing as "future" punishments or rewards for one's actions.
5. The Sadducees believed in the "Agency" of man. They believed that man was free to choose for himself the manner in which he would conduct his life. They used this doctrine so heavily, that they almost excluded God from any decisions. They believed in choice without consequence.
6. The Sadducees rejected the idea of another world. There were no worlds without end, no spirit world, and no pre-earth existence.

By the time of Christ, the political power in the Sanhedrin had swung from the Sadducees to the Pharisees, though they maintained the seat power. Though they had lost the majority, they maintained a grip of power until they dropped from existence. The Sadducees seemed to be a party with less strength and fewer followers while the Pharisees were growing. By 100CE, the Sadducees disappeared

from recorded history. Even at the time of Christ, Josephus records that the number of Sadducees were but a few. For the most part, they were an elite group.

**Pharisees** - Similar to the Sadducees, the Pharisees were a religious party or school; however, they were seldom of social or financial prominence. Where the Sadducees were considered rich aristocrats, the Pharisees were common folk often lacking prestigious family lines. By the time of Christ, they were increasing in prominence and popularity. According to Josephus, there were over 6,000 Pharisees at the time of Christ. Many consider the Pharisees as the 'Formalist' among the Jews. The Pharisees, if one had to summarize them, were sticklers for the law. They believed in adhering to the letter of the written law and at the same time accepted the fact that there existed an oral law that had been passed down among the scribes. This oral law served as explanation to the written law. The Pharisees relied heavily upon the scribes to define and clarify the written law based on their oral tradition. In our day, the first portion of the Talmud contains the oral law. Using the written and oral law, the Pharisees were fanatics about keeping the rituals and practices of the religion to strict adherence. The main differing doctrine that set the Pharisees apart from other sects in Judea was the belief in the resurrection. Many believe that the Pharisees were closest to the future Christians. The Pharisees gained great political strength and respect among the Jews. Due to this fact they gained seats on the Sanhedrin. The basic beliefs of the Pharisees are as follows;

1. The Pharisees embraced the belief of resurrection.
2. The Pharisees believed that there was more to God's law than was contained in holy writ. They believed in oral traditions, interpretation, and rabbinical review. Even so, they were fanatical in their approach to the law.
3. The Pharisees believe in the existence of spirits and angels.
4. The Pharisees believed that God could punishment or reward one for his/her actions. At the same time, they believed in the idea of blind fate.
5. The Pharisees believe that God created this world and governs it. They believe in other spheres of existence.
6. The Pharisees were considered to be lenient relative to the Sadducees approach to the law.

**Essenes** - According to Josephus, there were over 4,000 Essenes at the time of Christ. Interestingly, most people think of the two majority religious groups of ancient Israel as the Sadducees and the Pharisees, when in reality it was probably the Pharisees and the Essenes. The Essenes can hardly be classified as a political or governmental "party", since they tried to clearly separate themselves from politics. In that respect, the Pharisees and Sadducees clearly dominated the stage. The Essenes were a grass roots movement in meridian Israel. They believed in purification and a return to the doctrines of Moses. They were a fanatical group, denouncing the idea that adherence to the law or any code of doctrines brought about divine favor without personal purity. They felt that the Pharisees and Sadducees had lost sight of true religion and were caught up in the bureaucracy of carnal desires and rituals without meaning. Many consider the Essenes a small insignificant group; however, given the numbers they cannot be ignored when studying the New Testament. It should also be noted that, John the Baptist was probably raised in an Essene community, and lived an Essene life style. There were many sects within the Essenes. Some sects took their vow of purity so deep that they separated themselves from the Jewish community all together, many of whom lived in the Desert near the Dead Sea. Even sects that lived in Jewish communities, tried to separate themselves in their daily activities. Apparently, the Essenes claimed to have a royal priestly lineage from Zadok. The head of an Essene community was called a "Teacher of Righteousness". The beliefs of the Essenes are detailed and numerous. Some of the major beliefs are as follows:

1. The Essenes believed in true conversion prior to membership. A potential convert, must serve in the community for 1 year prior to joining.
2. The Essenes were sticklers for purity. They ritually bathed twice a day prior to meals, and anytime they came in contact with something considered impure. They required absolute worthiness. Rituals were always second to purity.
3. The Essenes believed in a pseudo law of consecration. The community worked together, ate together, and conducted all aspects of life with a form of common consent.
4. They believed in an absolute hierarchy. The head of the community, the Priest or Teacher of Righteousness, was the last word. Similarly, no one in the community did anything without the permission of the Leader.
5. The Essenes were stricter in their observance of the Sabbath, and other laws, than the Pharisees and Sadducees. They followed the law to the letter.
6. They believed in life after death. Like the Pharisees, they believed that there is a spirit and it continues after death.
7. They believed in Angels and a God that was actively involved in their lives. In fact, they left very little to their own choice. They felt everything was a result of fate. The Sadducees believed in free agency to an extreme. The Essenes believed in absolute fate, while the Pharisees believed in both.
8. The Essenes centered their lives on a central sanctuary, they associated with the Temple. All facets of life revolved around worship in the sanctuary.
9. The Essenes based most of their religion on the importance of covenants. Covenants were vital to God's commandments, and so sacred to the Essenes that they were kept secret from the outside world.

**The Herodians** - The "Herodians" were a smaller, yet significant sect among the Jewish government. They were supporters of Herod. Their belief was not necessarily in Herod, but in the hope that the Jews would somehow sever their ties to Rome and again rule themselves. Since the family of Herod had acquired so much power and authority, they were seen as a possible way to obtain political freedom.

**The Zealots** - A "Zealot" is a member of a Jewish sect, noted for its uncompromising opposition to pagan Rome and their beliefs in multiple gods. The Zealots were an aggressive political party whose concern for the national and religious life of the Jewish people led them to despise even Jews who sought peace and conciliation with the Roman authorities. A census of Galilee ordered by Rome in 6CE, spurred the Zealots to rally the populace to noncompliance on the grounds that agreement was an implicit acknowledgement by Jews of the right of pagans to rule their nation. Extremist among the Zealots turned to terrorism and assassination and became known as Sicarii (Greek sikarioi, "dagger man"). They frequented public places with hidden daggers to strike down persons friendly to Rome.

**The Publican** - The "Publicans" were the "IRS collectors" of the ancient Roman Empire. The Romans farmed out the collection to locals who desired to make a healthy living for themselves in the process. The taxes were delivered to the Roman 'Publicum'; hence, a publican. They were seen by the Jews as traitors.

See also the commentary for priests in Chapter 2, footnote #5.



- 11- **scribes** - The "Scribes" were not members of the Sanhedrin. The scribes were part of a truly old profession in Israel. King David created the office of scribe, or "saphar". They worked on writing the king's letters, writing the laws and decrees of the land, and managing the finances of the Kingdom. By the time of King Hezekiah, the scribes were responsible for transcribing old records, studying and interpreting the law, as well as teaching others of their interpretation. The scribes were a class of priests, so to speak. After the time of Christ, they were divided into two religious/political classes, the zealots and the disciples of Hillel. The Pharisees relied heavily on their interpretation of the law. Scribes could progress to become rabbis or members of the Sanhedrin. The title lawyer is suspected to be the same as scribe. **Scribes, in many aspects, replaced the prophets.**



What was Herod's relationship with the Scribes and Priests? That is like asking what the relationship is between a king, the politicians and the lawyers. They are all part of the political system. The Chief Priests and Scribes may have had distain for Herod, but they worked with him to get what they wanted. Many of the Chief Priests had received their appointments to the Sanhedrin from Herod. The Scribes were obviously needed by Herod and the Politicians to maneuver the law, and the scribes needed Herod and the Politicians to justify their profession. It was a symbiotic relationship, whether they liked each other or not.

As the Magi inquired about the "new king" that was to have been born, it would have sent rumors of a Messiah throughout the city of Jerusalem and probably Judea. Herod would have naturally sent for the scribes to see if there was validity to the fact through the prophecies. The Scribes must have been aware of the prophecy in Micah stating that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, because the Magi were sent there and Herod knew to kill the infants of Bethlehem when the Magi did not return with exact news of where he was.

- 12- **where** - Herod went to the scribes to find out "where" Christ should be born. He obviously believed the Magi, though at this point it does not say that he had personally met with them. He had heard the things that they are saying. He needs to find this Messiah. Joseph Smith, under divine inspiration, gave us a more correct translation of this passage. He wrote, **"And when he had gathered all the chief priests, and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, saying, Where is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which Christ should be born? For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets. And they said unto him, It is written by the prophets, that he should be born in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus have they said, The word of the Lord came unto us, saying, And thou Bethlehem, which lieth in the land of Judea, in thee shall be born a prince, which art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel."** (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 3:4-6). Herod could not remove the possible threat to his throne, unless he knew the "where". The Scribes gave him the city, but more they knew not.

- 13- **stood over** - So here we have introduced one of the most puzzling characteristics of the "Star" of the nativity. The star appears to have moved before the Magi until it stood over the house where the young child lived. So the question is, how can a star stand over a house of the young child? This gives credibility to the theory that the star was a phenomenon that we cannot currently explain, and must be a supernatural act of Deity. The Lord led the children of Israel by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. We have no explanation on how this was done, only that God was capable of the act. The star might very well fit into this category. Additionally, Herod was apparently not capable of following the star. Why not? Could he see it? Was it seen by faith? Was it available only to those that sought with a pure heart? The answer to these questions are currently unknown. We do know that the Magi followed the star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Somehow the star stood directly over the house of the newborn Messiah.



- 14- **prophet** - The scribes report to Herod that their records show that "the prophet" wrote the following prophecy;

**"And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."** (Matthew 2:6)

It would appear that the scribes were either paraphrasing an ancient prophecy, or the subsequent translators and multiple translations of the prophecy have given a slightly different presentation to the original prophecy of Micah. Micah prophesied;

**"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."** (Micah 5:2)

Whatever the case, the scribes did know the answer. They found the appropriate words of the prophet and delivered them to a very wicked Herod. They told him where the Messiah was to be born. Here begs a question. What kind of men, professing to know and believe in the scriptures, would give the whereabouts of what may be the promised Messiah to the likes of Herod. It is an indication that the scribes and chief priests were wicked men. See also commentary in Chapter 4, footnote #35.

- 15- **Juda** - Verse 6 of Matthew chapter 2 makes a reference to the princes of Juda. When the promised land was divided among the tribes, the tribes then divided their land among their princes. This sounds odd. The children of Israel had princes? Technically, yes. Each family in the tribe had a patriarch. Typically, the oldest male leader. These family heads were called "princes" at least that is the English word that we have chosen to translate from the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for prince is "שַׂר" or "sar". It means "prince", "ruler", "leader", "chief", "chieftain", "official" or "captain". The prophecy by Micah makes reference to the fact that Bethlehem is a little town among the thousands in Judah, and yet a ruler shall come forth from Bethlehem who will be everlasting. Ruler can easily be replaced by prince. The prince of peace, or the Messiah. See also commentary in Chapter 2, footnote #4, Chapter 7, footnote #32, and Chapter 9, footnote #21.

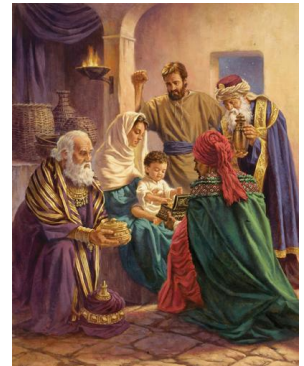
- 16- **governor** - The term "Governor" is actually translated from Greek word "ἡγεμονία" or "hegeomai" meaning "leader", "to go before", "forerunner", "to have authority over", "a prince, of regal power", "governor", "viceroi", "chief", or "commander". This word appears in Matthew 2:5, but does not appear in the Old Testament scripture from which we believe it originates. Micah 5:2 does not use the word governor and since the oldest versions of the New Testament is in Greek and the Old Testament is in Hebrew, it is hard to compare translations. The Greek word Governor could be the same as Ruler in Micah's prophecy. In either case, both are fitting descriptions of the Messiah. The Psalmist spoke of the Messiah when he wrote, **"For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations."** (Psalms 22:28). See also commentary for Chapter 9, verse 13.

- 17- **rule** - The word "rule" is translated from the Greek word "ποιμαίνω" or "poimaino" meaning "to feed", "to tend a flock", "keep sheep", "rule", "govern", "furnish a pasture for food", "nourish", or "to serve or supply". What an interesting Greek word. The Jewish hierarchy were looking for a King Messiah. One who would rule with military might, destroying their enemies, and conquering any that would oppose the children of Abraham. The Messiah came. He was Jesus. He had no military army, at least not a mortal one. Most would argue that He never ruled on earth. However, let's look at the Greek word "poimaino", which also means to feed or tend to the flock. This was absolutely what the Savior did. He ruled like a shepherd does over His sheep. He nourished spiritually.

- 18- **time** - Herod knew the location of the birth place of the Messiah because the scribes had delivered the prophecy to him. What the scribes did not know is when the Messiah was born. Herod needed more information. How old was the child that he was looking for. Was he 2 years old? Was he just born? So, he calls the Magi in privately. Secretly meeting with the Magi surely kept the rumors down. The last thing Herod wanted was to give validity to the fact that a Jewish Messiah may have been born.

The question was posed; when did the star appear? There is much speculation as to what information this might provide. Did the star appear in the heaven at the time of Jesus' conception? Did it appear upon his birth? If the wise men were from Chaldea or Assyria, it could have appeared in the heaven at his birth and the wise men could have arrived before the 40 days of Mary's purification was up. If the wise men came from Persia, or further, the trip could have taken 9 months to a year. Such speculation has led to many theories. Some even speculate that the wise men arrived when the Savior was several years old. Unfortunately, this just doesn't match with the time line. Herod died in either 4BCE or 1BCE and the Holy family left soon after Mary's purification to reside in Egypt.

**19- young child** - The phrase "young child" has caused much speculation as to the age of the Savior at the arrival of the Wise Men. Most assume that the term "young child" is evidence that he was a year or more in age rather than a new born. The phrase "young child" is translated from one Greek word, "παιδίον" or "paidion" which can be translated as a young child, young boy or young girl. Even so, it can also be translated as children, little ones, an infant, a **child just recently born**, or a **more mature child**.



**20- worshipped** - The Jews worshipped by bowing. This was sign of submission. They recited prayers and scriptures fitting for the occasion. They covered their heads in respect, most often with a prayer shawl. They dressed in very modest clothing with their entire arm being covered. They often bore testimony. The offering of sacred gifts was also customary. Offering something was also a sign of submission. The scriptures do not indicate how these Wise Men worshipped the new Messiah, only that they did.

**21- house** - The term "house" is indeed a correct translation. The Magi do not appear to have visited a stable, a manger, or an inn. They visited a "oikia" or "oikia" which is a house or dwelling. Speculation would lead us to the conclusion that Mary and Joseph had obtained a house in Bethlehem, and opted not to return to Nazareth. They may also have found residence with a friend or neighbor. The Savior was visited by the Wise Men within a house. See also commentary for Chapter 2, footnote #48, Chapter 3, footnote #12, Chapter 5, footnote #7, Chapter 8, footnote #14, and Chapter 9, footnote #24.

**22- treasures** - The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were also prophetic, speaking of our Lord's offices of king, priest, and savior. Gold speaks of His kingship; frankincense was a spice used in the priestly duties; and myrrh was an embalming ointment anticipating His death. Many feel that the prophet Isaiah prophesied of the Wise Men's gifts when he wrote, **"A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord."** (Isaiah 60:6) If this scripture is truly a prophecy of the Wise Men, it might also lend insight to where they came from...Midian, Ephah and Sheba. Or is that just where they purchased camels from? As you can see there is much speculation as to where they came from.

The Wise Men, regardless of where they came from, came bearing gifts. **"The scriptural account of the visit of the wise men to Jesus and His mother states that they "fell down and worshipped him," and furthermore that "when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."** The offering of gifts to a superior in rank, either as to worldly status or recognized spiritual endowment, was a custom of early days and still prevails in many oriental lands. It is worthy of note that we have no record of these men from the east offering gifts to Herod in his palace; they did, however, impart of their treasure to the lowly Infant, in whom they recognized the King they had come to seek. The tendency to ascribe occult significance to even trifling details mentioned in scripture, and particularly as regards the life of Christ, has led to many fanciful suggestions concerning the gold and frankincense and myrrh specified in this incident. Some have supposed a half-hidden symbolism therein--gold a tribute to His royal estate, frankincense an offering in recognition of His priesthood, and myrrh for His burial. The sacred record offers no basis for such conjecture. Myrrh and frankincense are aromatic resins derived from plants indigenous to eastern lands, and they have been used from very early times in medicine and in the preparation of perfumes and incense mixtures. They were presumably among the natural productions of the lands from which the magi came, though probably even there they were costly and highly esteemed. Such, together with gold, which is of value among all nations, were most appropriate as gifts for a king. **Any mystical significance one may choose to attach to the presents must be remembered as his own supposition or fancy, and not as based on scriptural warrant."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 108).



**23- gold** - Gold, of course, was considered the most precious and valued metal known. It was highly prized. It was not found in Palestine, but had to be imported from the mines of Ophir and elsewhere. This made it all the more valuable throughout Palestine. It is a symbol of the celestial kingdom. It also symbolizes the blessings of the Father. As such it is also a symbol of royalty and kingship. The gold would have help pay for the cost of the Holy families trip to Egypt. Many suspect that it was given after Mary's purification, or she would not have offered a sacrifice of the poor.



**24- frankincense** - Frankincense is derived from three species of the genus *Boswellia* -- *B. carterii*, *B. papyri-fera*, and *B. thurifera* -- which grow in southern Arabia, India, and elsewhere. The gum is exuded from the incised bark in pale glittering drops. It had a bitter flavor and a strong balsamic odor when heated. The Egyptians used it for fumigation and embalming; the Israelites used it in worship in the Holy Place of the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 30:34). It was an intricate part of sacrifices. The law records, **"And when any will offer a meat offering unto the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon:"** (Leviticus 2:1). Consequently, frankincense symbolizes Priesthood. It represents the divine authority to act in God's name.



**25- myrrh** - Myrrh is valuable as a perfume and a main ingredient in the sacred anointing oil (Exodus 30:23). Several shrubs produce a perfumed resinous substance described as myrrh, but the one compounded in the anointing oil was probably from "*Commiphora myrrha*" or perhaps "*Balsamodendron myrrha*", a low thorny tree distributed across south Arabia and Ethiopia. The sap is pleasantly scented and dries into a solid resin. It could be diluted to form a liquid cosmetic product and may have been used by Egyptians in embalming. Myrrh is often associated with death, or overcoming death. What a fitting symbol for a Messiah that would conquer physical and spiritual death. Because of this, Myrrh has an interesting symbolic relationship with repentance, healing, and resurrection. **"Myrrh was certainly suitable for a king, and was used at his anointing (cf Ps xiv 8). But the gifts were also part of the common stock-in-trade of magi, and magical charms were written with myrrh-ink...Regarded as the tools of a trade, offerings of the magi would not be gifts of homage, but a declaration of dissociation from former practices."** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 13). Whether or not the Magi were disassociating themselves from magical charms remains to be seen. In fact, we know that they were righteous men so it is somewhat doubtful that the items were used in pagan practices and now being surrendered. Even so, there is an element of offering and repentance associated with the gifts.





**26- warned** - The wise men were warned of God in a dream. We are given no details of the dream, nor how many of the wise men were given the dream. All we know is that a dream was issued from heaven to the wise men. These were righteous men. The recognized the dream as divine. They followed the direction without any apparent questioning. This is important. There was no sign that Herod conveyed any intended evil to the wise men. In fact, Herod had asked them to tell him where the Messiah was once they found Him so he could worship him as well. The wise men, who truly were wise, had no evidence on which to base a suspicion of Herod. They most likely believed Herod and would have returned to Herod with a glorious report. Herod was the King. Surely the wise men would have honored his request out of respect. Or course, that would have resulted in the murder of Jesus. God protected His son, and gave clear direction to the wise men. He foiled the plans of Herod.

**27- country** - The wise men returned, without meeting with Herod, to their own country. See footnote #3 of this chapter for a discussion on where the wise men came from.

The wise men traveled a long way. They traveled under divine direction. God guided them. They witnessed the new born Messiah, and then they went home. **"Hence God raised up another class of witnesses--the 'wise men from the east'--witnesses that could enter the royal palace of proud King Herod and boldly ask: 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him'; a testimony that startled Herod and troubled all Jerusalem. So that indeed God raised up witnesses for Himself to meet all classes and conditions of men--the testimony of angels for the poor and the lowly; the testimony of wise men for the haughty king and proud priests of Judea. So that of the things concerning the birth of Messiah, no less than of the things of His death and resurrection from the dead, His disciples could say, 'these things were not done in a corner.'" (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 109). My question is: who did they witness to? There must have been a purpose to God bringing the Wise men to Bethlehem. Here are some theories;**

**Theory 1** - The Wise Men were righteous men from a society of believers. Possibly the ten tribes, or remnants of Israelites in Chaldea of Assyria. The wise men could have traveled so far so that they could return and bear testimony of what they had seen and strengthen those they left at home.

**Theory 2** - Mary and Joseph were poor. They Lord knew that they would need to take refuge in Egypt. Such a trip would no doubt be costly. Perhaps the Wise Men were sent to provide the necessary funds for their journey. We know that God provides every needful thing.

**Theory 3** - Though they did not return to Jerusalem to bear witness of the Messiah, they did bear a Testimony on their way to Bethlehem. The announced the sign of the star and bore testimony that they were on their way to visit the King of the Jews who had just been born. Perhaps this was their mission.

See also the commentary in Chapter 11, footnote #1.

**28- another way** - The wise men made their **"departure by another route"** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page13). Please review footnote #3 to see the possible routes that may have been taken.



