



MBS020

A MESSIANIC BIBLE STUDY FROM ARIEL MINISTRIES



# HOW DID THE WISE MEN KNOW? OR IS ASTROLOGY VALID?



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*Where is he that  
is born King of  
the Jews? for we  
saw his star in the  
east, and are come  
to worship him.*

*Matthew 2:2*

## INTRODUCTION

A great many of you are familiar with the account of the Wise-men's visit to the infant Yeshua (Jesus), recorded in Matthew 2:1-12: *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise-men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him. And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written through the prophet, And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are in no wise least among the princes of Judah: For out of you shall come forth a governor, Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel. Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him. And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

This passage contains the record of the visit of the Magi from the east who were led there by the visibility of a star. Because of this, even some believers have stated that there is some validity to astrology, and some have even attempted to develop a doctrine of biblical astrology.

Each year around Christmas time, nativity sets are erected. These nativity sets all appear to look alike. We have a baby Jesus in some type

of manger or in the lap of Mary, with Mary stands Joseph, on one side of the family of three we have shepherds, and on the other side we have three kings. This scene is totally and biblically invalid. First of all, the story of the shepherds and the story of the Wise-men are separated by approximately two years. The shepherds were there soon after Jesus was born. They found Him in a stable lying in a manger (Lk. 2:12, 16). The Wise-men only saw the star when Yeshua was born and it took them some time to get to Jerusalem. According to verse 11, when they finally found Jesus, they found Him in a home, not in a stable. So the Wise-men and the shepherds never even met. The Matthew account makes it rather clear that Yeshua was approximately two years old by the time these Wise-men appear.

Furthermore, what is often thought is that there were just three kings. A famous Christmas song begins with the words, "We three kings of orient are." First of all, notice we are not told how many there are. We know there had to be at least two because the word Wise-men is in the plural. There may have been two; there may have been twenty; there may have been two hundred or two thousand. The Bible does not specifically say. There is no real knowledge that there were only three. The reason people think there were only three is because Yeshua was given three different types of gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh. This is hardly evidence at all. There could have been ten people giving gold or twenty giving frankincense or thirty giving myrrh. The number of gifts does not prove that there were only three Wise-men. Furthermore, Matthew never says that these men were "kings." We know for certain that these were not kings because the specific title they are given in the Greek text is magoy or "Magi" which means Wise-men or more specifically "astrologers." What we have in the Matthew account are an unknown number of astrologers from the East. In the Bible, the East is always the area of Mesopotamia, so there are at least two astrologers from Babylon.

Suddenly astrologers arrive in Jerusalem asking the question "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Did they gain this knowledge through astrology? This incident raises a number of questions. First, how did these men know anything about the birth of a Jewish king? And secondly, even knowing about the birth of a Jewish king, why would Babylonian astrologers want to come and worship Him? After all, Babylonian astrologers did not worship other Jewish kings; why would they want to worship this particular king? Again, the question is: how did the Wise-men know?

Let's break the passage down and begin looking at it seriously, point-by-point, and see if they really learned it all from astrology or if something else is going on.

The basic rule of interpretation is this: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore, take

every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.” We should take the Bible exactly as it says, unless there is some indication in the text and in the context that tells us we cannot take it literally.

First of all, let’s focus our attention on the issue of the star. To begin with, that this was no ordinary star is evident by the actions which this star took. The star is referred to as “His star” or “the King of the Jews’ star,” in a way that the other stars simply cannot be. This star appears and disappears. This star moves from east to west. This star moves from north to south. This star hovers over one single house in Bethlehem and points to where the Messiah is. Any literal star, as we know it, that would hover over only one house in Bethlehem would destroy this entire planet. It is very evident that this cannot be a literal star. Again, five things about this star make it obvious that it cannot be a real star. First, it is the personal star of the King of the Jews. Secondly, it appears and disappears. Thirdly, it moves from east to west. Fourthly, it moves north to south. And the fifth thing is that it literally hovers over one single house in Bethlehem. Obviously it must be something different, but what is it?

The Greek word for star simply means “radiance” or “brilliance.” By this star coming in the form of a light, what we actually have is the appearance of the Shechinah Glory rather than an astrologer’s star. The Shechinah Glory is the visible manifestation of God’s presence. Whenever God became visible in the Old Testament that is what is referred to as the Shechinah Glory. In most cases, the Shechinah Glory came in the form of a light, fire, cloud or some combination of these three things. Over in Babylon, a light, a brilliance, a radiance, appears over the area that may look like a star from a distance and yet has actions which no star can do or does do. What these Wise-men actually saw was the Shechinah Glory. When they saw this Shechinah Glory, this unusual brilliance, they deduced that it was a signal that the King of the Jews, the Messiah, had finally been born.

Having determined that this star was not a literal star but the Shechinah Glory still does not answer all the questions. The one question still is: how did the Wise-men know anything about the birth of a Jewish king? How could Gentile, Babylonian astrologers know anything about the birth of a Jewish king? Even if they did know something about births of Jewish kings, why would they want to come and worship this particular one?

Having said what we have about the star, we have so far failed to answer the real issue. If it is not by means of astrology that the Magi or Wise-men knew about the birth of a Jewish king, how did they know?

From the New Testament account, all that we can deduce is the fact that Gentile, Babylonian astrologers somehow knew that the birth of the King of the Jews had taken place by means of a star-like shining brilliance in the heavens that moved from east to west and hovered over the very house where Jesus was.

For the answer to the question of how they knew, we must look to the Old Testament. To begin with, we must note that the only place in the entire Old Testament that dates the Messiah's coming is the famous Seventy Sevens (weeks) of Daniel, found in Daniel 9:24-27. Besides this, the Book of Daniel was not written in Israel, but in the city of Babylon; much of it is written in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonian Empire. So it was that, in the city of Babylon, a book was written which prophesied when the Messiah was to come.

But that is not all. Daniel was always associated with Babylonian astrologers (Dan. 1:19-20; 2:12-13, 47; 4:7-9; 5:11-12). Nebuchadnezzar, not having much spiritual discernment, did not realize that the source of Daniel's ability was not the stars of the heavens, but the God of Heaven. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel the head of all the astrologers of Babylon. It was in this environment and in this company that Daniel penned his book, revealing the time of the Messiah's coming.

A day came when Daniel was able to save the lives of all of the Babylonian astrologers. Nebuchadnezzar had an unusual dream, and when the astrologers were unable to interpret his dream, he sentenced every one of them to execution. Among those arrested were Daniel and his three friends because, from the viewpoint of the Babylonians, these four Hebrews were part of the Babylonian School of Astrology and, therefore, to be executed. But Daniel requested and received an audience with the king. After the audience, Daniel did interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. By interpreting that dream, he saved the lives of all the other astrologers. In fact, this is the way he became the head of the Babylonian School of Astrology. Since Daniel saved their lives as well as becoming their head, there is little doubt that he was able to lead many of them to a saving knowledge of the God of Israel. A number of these astrologers turned away from the worship of the stars to the worship of the God of Israel who made the stars.

So a line of Babylonian astrologers from generation to generation worshiped the true God and, having Daniel's prophecy, looked forward to the coming of the King of the Jews. From the Book of Daniel, then, we can conclude that Babylonian astrologers did know about what time the Messiah was to be born. However, the Book of Daniel says nothing about a star that would in some way announce the Messiah's birth. So how, then, did the astrologers know anything about a star?

For this question, we must go back even earlier in the Old Testament to the prophecies of Balaam, who was hired by the king of Moab to curse the Jews. Four times he tried to curse them, but each time God took over his mouth; instead of cursing the Jews, he ended up blessing them. In the course of his blessings of the Jews, he came forth with four key Messianic prophecies. One of these prophecies is found in Numbers 24:17: *I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite through the corners of Moab, And break down all the sons of tumult.*

Balaam, much to his own reluctance and regret, was forced by God to prophesy of the coming of the Jewish Messiah and he related that to a star. This is not a literal star because it then says concerning this star: “And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” The star and the sceptre are one and the same. Remember that the term sceptre is a symbol of royalty or kingship. This star, which would rise out of Jacob, is a king.

Furthermore, Balaam’s occupation was that of astrology. Even more significant was the fact that he came from the city of Pethor, a city on the banks of the Euphrates River in Babylonia (Num. 22:5; Deut. 23:4). So, we have a double Babylonian connection here. We have, of course, the Book of Daniel, which spelled out how many years would transpire before the birth of the King of the Jews; but then we have the prophecy of Balaam concerning the star and, again, Balaam was part of the Babylonian School of Astrology. Hence, the revelation of a star in relation to the Messiah’s birth came by way of a Babylonian astrologer who, no doubt, passed the information down to his colleagues. Centuries later, Daniel was able to expound to the Babylonian astrologers as to the time that “the star of Jacob” would come.

How then did the Wise-men know? Not by gazing at the stars in the pseudo-science of astrology, but by revelation of God as contained in the Scriptures by means of the prophecies of Balaam and Daniel. Hence, the story of the Wise-men gives no validity to astrology whatsoever.

The Wise-men gave Yeshua three types of gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh. All of these are full of Old Testament symbolism. Gold is the symbol of royalty or kingship, emphasizing that Jesus is a king. Frankincense was the symbol of deity, because it was part of the special incense burned on the Altar of Incense within the Holy Place, and the smoke penetrated into God’s presence in the Holy of Holies itself. Frankincense emphasizes Yeshua is God. Myrrh was associated in the Old Testament with death and embalming.

While the first line of that famous Christmas song, “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” is not biblically accurate, the last line that says, “King and God and Sacrifice” certainly is. By giving these gifts to the family

of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, the Wise-men provided the income for the family to be able to escape to Egypt, live there for approximately two years, and to have the income to finance their trip back to Nazareth after the death of Herod the Great. ☆

**NOTES**

**IF YOU ENJOYED THIS  
BIBLE STUDY,  
DR. FRUCHTENBAUM  
RECOMMENDS:**

*MBS009, 016, 028, 031, 032,  
035, 036, 040, 043, 044, 048,  
049, 056, 060, 061, 069, 070,  
075, 076, 094, 099, 127, 134,  
183, 185.*



