

The Magi

- 1) Who were the Magi?
 - a) Matthew is the only gospel that provides details of their visit (Matt. 12:1-12).
 - b) The term translated “magi” refers to a wise man and priest who is an expert in astrology, natural science and the interpretation of dreams (μάγος, magos).
 - c) Per Greek historian Herodotus, the magi originated from one of the six tribes of the Medes (in the East).
 - d) They were a priestly caste similar to the Levites.
 - e) Duties: provides counsel to the kings of the Babylonians, Medes and Persians in divine matters and other daily happenings.
 - f) Nebuchadnezzar gathered around him the religious teachers and wise men of the nations he conquered (Dan. 1:3-4, 20).
 - g) The Pharaoh in Joseph’s day also surrounded himself with so called “magicians and wise men (Gen 41:8, 41:24).
 - h) Their role in interpreting divine matters is also mentioned in the Bible, as Daniel in the days of Nebuchadnezzar became the "chief of the magicians (master of the "Magi"), conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners" (Dan.5:11; cf. Jer.39:13, where one *Rab-mag* was the chief office of the Magi).
 - i) Daniel's influence over the Magian colleges of the East must explain why they were looking for astronomical confirmation to go along with the prophecies that called for a Jewish king to be born in those days (Dan.9:24-27)
 - j) They were highly esteemed in religious matters and wielded considerable clout in the political arena.
 - k) Clearly they were not considered charlatans or sorcerers who preyed upon people.
 - l) Herod’s reception of them and his reaction to their report demonstrates their words carried great weight.
 - m) Herod and Jerusalem would hardly have been concerned if they had the reputation of being charlatans.
 - n) Most Jews of the time admired the Magi, as they were not idolaters, and because of their former association with Daniel (their main occupation was in the interpretation of things divine: dreams, visions, prophecies, astronomical signs).
 - o) When this particular group came to Jerusalem, they came to worship the king, and note that the gifts brought by the Magi, "gold, frankincense, and myrrh," were the usual gifts of subject nations (Psa. 72:15, 1 Kings 10:2, 10, 2 Chron. 9:24, Isa. 60:6).
 - p) From Matthew we learn that the primary factor that brought the Magi to Jerusalem was the appearance of a star.

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- q) According to the Magi this star was associated with the birth of the King of the Jews; hence they refer to it as “his star.”
 - r) Based on unique astronomical signs that that occurred in the constellations of Leo (Judah) and Virgo (the Virgin), associated with Jupiter (the king-planet) and Regulus (the king-star) in 3/2 BC, the Magi embarked on their journey westward following “his star” towards Bethlehem.
 - s) The “star” or stellar body that played the most prominent role in the year of 3/2BC and which figured in almost every celestial event was Jupiter.
 - t) Jupiter moved from its union with three other planets in Aug. 3BC and proceeded in its apparent motion westward.
 - u) As the Magi came from the East, we may surmise that they followed the normal movement of the planet toward Jerusalem as it progressed westward each day, letting Jupiter lead them on (**Matthew 2:9** And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, **went on before them**, until it came and stood over where the Child was.).
 - v) Matthew’s phraseology, “it came and stood over where the child was” alludes to the retrogression and progression of Jupiter when at certain times the planet appears to be stationary.
 - w) It’s amazing that the planet appeared to stand over Bethlehem where the Messiah was located.
- 2) Synopsis of the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt and return to Israel.
- a) It has long been recognized that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem at some time **after** Christ was born (Matt. 2:2).
 - b) He had been circumcised and presented in the Temple some 40 days after His birth (Luk.2:21-24).
 - c) Luke indicates that they returned to Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:39).
 - d) For some reason after journeying back to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary decided to return and reside in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1, 11).
 - e) When the Magi arrived, the parents of Jesus were then living in a house not in a stable with Jesus laying in a manger (Matt. 2:11- οἰκία, oikia, “house cf. Luke 2:7- φάτνη, phatne, “manger”).
 - f) Moreover Jesus was being called a “child” not a “baby” (Matt 2:11- παιδίον, paidon, “Child” cf. Luke 2:12- βρέφος, brephos, “baby” or infant).
 - g) After the Magi presented their gifts, they returned home by a different route, having been warned by an angel.
 - h) Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled to Egypt in late 2BC.

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- i) Based on the Magi's report Herod deduced that this "King of the Jews" had indeed been born and was no older than 2 years old.
- j) Herod then murdered the male children in and around Bethlehem two years old and younger (Matt. 2:16).
- k) This atrocity also fulfilled an OT prophecy (Matt. 2:17-18 cf. Jer. 31:15).
- l) Despite the murderous intentions of Herod, God faithfully preserved the life of Christ.
- m) Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Nazareth after Herod died (Matt. 2:19-23).