

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

WEEK 6 – JESUS' BIRTH: THE MAGI VISIT THE KING

The heart and soul of the Christmas accounts in the Gospels is to tell us that Jesus in the events surrounding His birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The birth of Jesus fulfilled, among other references: Micah 5:2; Gen. 3:15; Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 31:15; Hosea 11:1.

The account of the shepherds speaks to the Messiah Who came as our perfect Passover Lamb – Who came – in His first coming – as the Suffering Servant – Who died for our sins. He's coming again. We're waiting and watching! Scripture speaks to a gap between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming.

We talked about the shepherds from the Gospel of Luke. We're going to read about the Magi from the book of Matthew. These Magi appear on the scene – after time has gone by – following a gap - possibly 2 years from the time of Jesus birth. There is a gap between the shepherds visiting and the visit from the Magi. And, we see the wise men visiting Jesus with a – different “agenda”. The shepherds came to the family soon after Jesus was born. They found Him lying in a manger (Luke 2:12, 16) in Bethlehem Ephrathah. The wise men only saw the star when Jesus was born and it took them some time to get to Bethlehem? NO - Jerusalem (Matt. 2:7, 16). The wise men found Him in a house – not lying in a manger (Matt. 2:11). AND, He was a “Child,” not a “baby” (Matt. 2:11)

Matt. 2:1-2. . . AFTER the birth of Jesus, wise men from the East came to – JERUSALEM! These wise men (and we don't know how many; the text doesn't state) – go to JERUSALEM - to find the KING of the Jews!!!

The shepherds' account speaks to Jesus as the Suffering Servant. When does He come as the Suffering Servant? At His first coming. The Magi's account speaks to Jesus as the King? When does Jesus come as King? At His second coming. And, there's a GAP between Jesus' first and second coming. There's a GAP between the shepherds' visit and the visit by the wise men.

Matthew 2:1-12

Were there three wise men? There had to be at least 2 because the text tells us there were wise “men”. There may have been 20. There might've been 300. The text is silent. ‘

Matthew never calls these men “kings”. They were not kings. The Greek gives them the title of “magoi” or “Magi” – which means astrologers. We have an unknown number of astrologers from the East. We have a limited amount of information about the Magi in the NT. However, we read about the Magi in Daniel.

Briefly – they were a priestly tribe of people from the Medes and the Persians. There was not much of a distinction between the superstition (astrology) and the science (astronomy). They were known as those who interpret dreams (Daniel 2:1-4).

At the time of the Babylonian Empire, these Magi were dwelling in the area of Babylon. What other people group was in Babylon at that time? The Jews! Daniel had a relationship with the wise men. Why? The Magi could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The king told them if they didn't deliver he would cut them in pieces and make their homes an ash heap. The king gave the command to destroy all the wise men and the killing began (Dan. 2:13). They also sought Daniel and his companions to kill them. Daniel asked for time to interpret the dream. And, Daniel asked that the wise men not be destroyed. Daniel interprets Neb's dream and Nebuchadnezzar makes Daniel the chief administrator/master over the wise men – Daniel 2:48. (Daniel 4:9 – Belteshazzar (Daniel) – chief of the Magi)

Daniel, a faithful Jew, taken into captivity to Babylon - believed in God's provision – the Messiah. Do you think he shared that with the Magi? The book of Daniel speaks about the time of the Messiah – so here was a book written in Babylon which prophesied about WHEN the Messiah was to come (Daniel 9:24-27)

A bit more about the Magi – from history – no Persian was ever able to become king unless he mastered scientific and religious disciplines of the Magi and unless he was APPROVED by the Magi. So, the Magi were KING MAKERS. The Persians were having problems with their king at that time – King Freidas IV And, he was deposed. The Magi – the “king makers” – were looking for a new king.

Galatians 4:4 – in the fullness of time. . . .

The Magi had heard Daniel tell of the King of the Jews who would rule the world. So they came to Jerusalem – where the King of the Jews would reign – according to the Hebrew Scriptures. They didn't go directly to Bethlehem.

Herod – not Jewish. He was Idumean – of the line of ESAU. Rebekah had two nations in her womb – she was told by God – when she was carrying Jacob and Esau. Jacob was Israel. Esau represented the Arab nations (he married Canaanite women; he married a daughter of Ishmael). And, Herod was appointed as the King of the Jews by Rome – by Caesar Augustus. Herod was paranoid that his crown would be removed. Herod killed his wife, his mother-in-law, his three sons – in protecting his throne! When the Magi spoke with Herod, he was “troubled” (agitated) We don't see the people of Jerusalem scurrying to Bethlehem to see the King – and the scribes did know that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

THERE IS A PURPOSE – ACCORDING TO GOD'S ENTIRE PLAN – IN THE MAGI'S VISIT.

The star. . .

Luke 2:9 – what was shining in the sky? I’m suggesting that the “star” was the glory of God. In the OT, God’s glory is manifested as light. The glory of God is seen as a cloud of light in the day and pillar of fire at night.

Isa. 60:1 – *“Arise, shine, for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.”*

Isa. 9:2 – *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.”*

When Moses went up to meet with God he said, “Show me Thy glory” (Ex. 33:18ff) – what happened (Ex. 34:29ff) – the skin of Moses’ face shone!! When we see Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration, in His glory, (Matt. 17:2), His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light. When Jesus returns – *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matt. 24:30). And, in the new Jerusalem – Rev. 21:23 – the city will have no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it for the glory of God will illumine it. The Lamb is its light!!

I believe it was the glory of God that shone that night when God’s glory was – descending to earth – in Jesus. Isa. 60:1-3 – tells us that the light was God’s glory in Jesus. I believe it was the glory of God that the Magi saw.

In Hebrew the word for star is Kowkab (cohav) and its meaning is to shine or to blaze forth. In Greek – “radiance,” “brilliance” Sometimes the word is used of a real star. Sometimes it speaks of an angel and sometimes it speaks of men. It doesn’t have to be a real star. In fact, if it was a burning heavenly body – it would’ve burned up the house as it “stood over where the young Child was”!!!

The Book of Daniel says nothing about a star that would in some way announce the Messiah’s birth. So – how did the Magi know anything about a star? In Numbers we read of the prophecy of Balaam who was hired by the King of Moab to curse the Jews. Numbers 24:17 speaks of a star – “I see HIM, but not now; I behold HIM, but not nigh: There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel and shall smite through the corners of Moab and break down all the sons of tumult.” The star and the scepter are one and the same. Scepter is a symbol of – royalty. The star that would rise is a king.

This prophecy in Numbers is Messianic. Matthew 24:30 – the sign of the Son of Man. . . coming in the clouds w/ power and great glory. (Daniel 7:13) How did the Apostle John see Jesus in Rev. 1:16 – His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

I believe He had the same sign the first time He came! They saw HIS star in the East – His blazing – His brightness – His glory.

Herod wanted to know the time the star appeared. That word for appeared means that which lights up – what time was it when that blazing lit up? The Magi saw HIS star in the East. Herod asked them about it because it appears that Herod DID NOT see it. Is God so selective? Ex. 14:19-20 – the Angel of the Lord went before the camp of Israel – the pillar of cloud went before them. And, behind them this cloud was darkness to the Egyptians. (I Cor. 1:18 – “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”)

No where in Scripture do we read that the star led the Magi to Jerusalem. Matt. 2:9 – after the Magi left Herod – “behold” – the star which they had seen in the East (the text doesn’t say that the star had been leading them) “It went before them.” This harkens back to the Exodus from Egypt. The pillar of cloud (God’s glory – His manifested presence) went before the children of Israel (Ex. 14:19). We do see the Magi winding up in Jerusalem and now we know why – because of Daniel’s teaching about the Messiah – the King of Kings reigning from Jerusalem. They saw HIS star in the East and they knew where to go – to the City of God – Jerusalem. The presence of God guided them!

Timeframe:

A 2-year gap:

- Mary and Joseph were in a house. . .
- Jesus is noted as a young Child
- When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus – 40 days after His birth – they brought turtledoves because they were poor (hadn’t yet rec’d the gold, frankincense and myrrh)
- Herod kills all children 2 years and younger

And – the gold, frankincense and myrrh – the Magi did indeed understand God’s Messiah:

- Gold – symbol of royalty – Jesus is King
- Frankincense – symbol of deity – it was used on the altar of incense before the Holy of Holies in the Temple – penetrating into God’s presence.
- Myrrh – symbol of sacrifice – it was used for embalming the dead.

These gifts truly depict the Messiah Who is God, Who would die for sin, and Who will return and reign as King. In the Christmas account in Matthew and Luke we see God’s plan of salvation – in a way that we might’ve not before seen it. How does the account of the Magi fit into God’s entire plan of salvation? Is God’s plan of salvation only for the Jewish people? How do we know it’s for the world? Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:5-6

Isaiah 11:10 – context: Millennial kingdom. The Gentiles shall seek the Root of Jesse
 Luke 2:32 – Simeon’s prayer to God – when he was led by the Holy Spirit into the temple. Simeon exclaims that this Child would be a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 60 – THE GENTILES BLESS ZION

Isaiah 60:1-3 – the Gentiles shall come to your light (speaking to Israel) – the light that God has given them through the Messiah.

Isaiah 60:5 – the WEALTH of the Gentiles shall come to you

Have we seen this elsewhere in Scripture?

Queen of Sheba bringing treasures to Solomon

I Kings 10:1

Exodus 12 – asking Egyptians for gold, silver, and cloth

II Chron. 17:11 - Philistines and Arabians brought Jehoshaphat

gifts

Psalm 72: 1, 11, 15; Zechariah 14:16-19

Romans 15:25-27 – Gentile collection for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

The Christmas account in Scripture does not only speak of Jesus' first coming, it proclaims His Second Coming as well.

HOMEWORK

What were your “V8” moments? What was new to you?

How does the Christmas account from Luke and from Matthew impact your life?

Will your Christmas celebration this year be different? How?