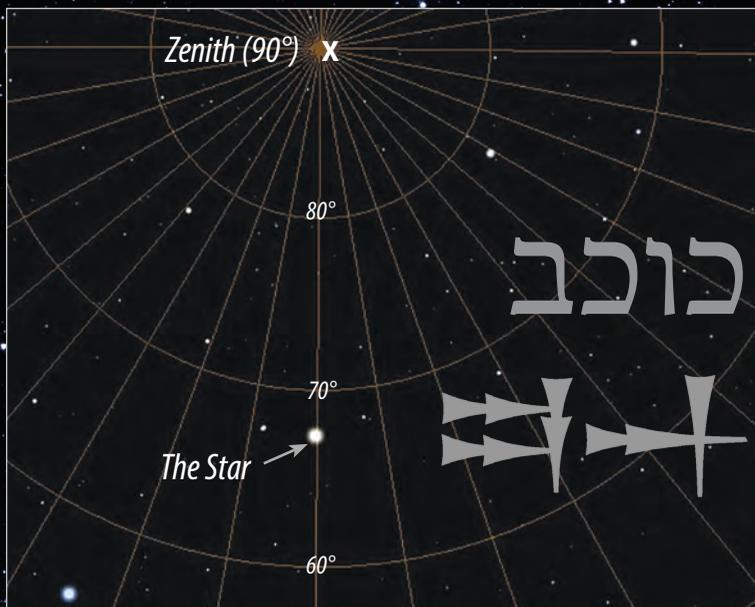


The Star of Bethlehem

Signs in the East and a Surprise in the West



Dwight R. Hutchison



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by Dwight Hutchison



Editions Signes Célestes

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The Men from the East

A Portion of the Gospel of Matthew

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and

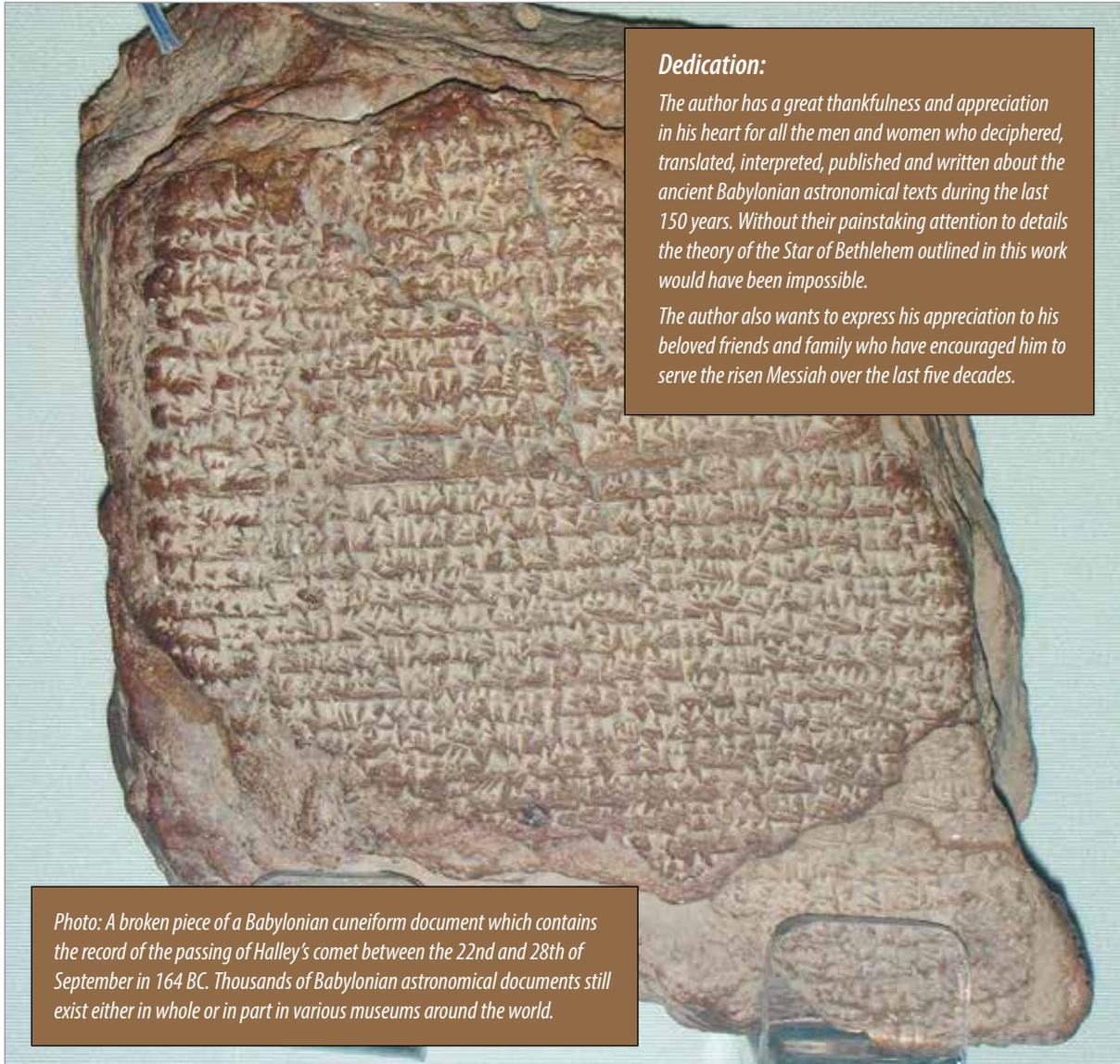
myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way. ...

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. (The Gospel According to Matthew 2:1-12 and 16)

Traditional Names of the Wise Men

Below are examples from several ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the traditional names of the wise men. Some traditions indicate that there were possibly three, six or twelve wise men.

Caspar	Hor	Apellius	Sarachin
Balthasar	Karsudan	Galgat	Perozadh
Melchior	Basanater	Amerius	Gushynasaph
Larvandar	Kagpha	Malgalat	
Gushnasaph	Badadakharida	Yazdegerd	
Hormisdas	Badadilma	Damascus	

***Dedication:***

The author has a great thankfulness and appreciation in his heart for all the men and women who deciphered, translated, interpreted, published and written about the ancient Babylonian astronomical texts during the last 150 years. Without their painstaking attention to details the theory of the Star of Bethlehem outlined in this work would have been impossible.

The author also wants to express his appreciation to his beloved friends and family who have encouraged him to serve the risen Messiah over the last five decades.

Photo: A broken piece of a Babylonian cuneiform document which contains the record of the passing of Halley's comet between the 22nd and 28th of September in 164 BC. Thousands of Babylonian astronomical documents still exist either in whole or in part in various museums around the world.

Introduction

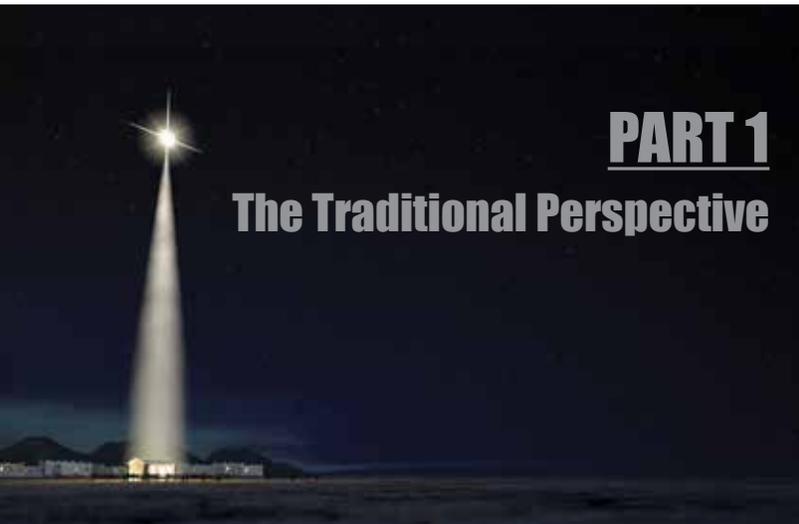
Each year in the month of December, many believers and non-believers alike sometimes pause and ask themselves questions like: “What was the star that attracted the attention of the wise men in Matthew’s famous story?” Or perhaps: “Was there really a heavenly object which informed the Magi about the Messiah?”

Many skeptics have made up their minds that such a star never existed. In the secular academic community, there is a widespread conviction that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew simply invented the story of the star. In October 2014, an international multi-disciplinary academic colloquium dedicated to the subject of the Star of Bethlehem was held at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.¹ An impressive group of experts presented twenty-two academic papers on subjects related to the star. Only four papers affirmed that the star might have been a real object. Two of those papers were centered on the theory developed by the astronomer Michael Molnar concerning celestial events in 6 BC.² In recent decades the researcher Ernest L. Martin and a lawyer, Frederick Larson, also made proposals concerning the star of Bethlehem, which have received significant acclaim by large audiences. However, their approaches have not been widely accepted in the academic community worldwide.³ Colin Nicholl’s more recent book, *The Great Christ Com-*

et, offers a technically sound, but completely hypothetical explanation for the star.⁴ Opinions are divided concerning his presentation.

Is it possible to affirm the existence of the Star of Bethlehem? How would one know? Can one demonstrate how the star attracted the attention of the ancient astronomers? This booklet will seek to answer several of these questions.

The Star of Bethlehem is often understood as involving a single introductory stellar event in the East and a final event in the skies above Bethlehem. In the approach to the story presented here, the star was involved in several celestial signs in the East and a single event over Judaea. In addition, it will be shown that the interaction of the star with other heavenly objects was a major key for the Magi in their understanding of the star. The star never served as a visual or directional guide. However, a series of royal celestial signs announced the coming of the Messiah.



Most Christians have very positive sentiments toward the story of the wise men. In our childhood, we have often marveled at the traditional story. The idea that the wise men visually followed a star all the way to Bethlehem has entered into our hearts and has become almost sacred. In the paragraphs that follow we will explore some difficulties with the traditional story. However, this is not to deny the reality of the wise men or the star, but rather to discover the story with new depth. We will try to set the account into its ancient context by exploring the star as a celestial sign. This booklet attempts to describe a real star and real wise men.

Because of its mysterious nature, many Christians have adopted the view that the star in Matthew's story was not a real heavenly object at all. In the minds of countless ancient and modern Christians, the star was a supernatural object, like an angel or perhaps the manifest presence of the glory of God, which was shining like a star. Even though there is no hint in the text itself that the "star" was a supernatural being or object, historically innumerable Christians have assumed that this was the case.



For many believers, identifying the star as an angel or the "shekinah" glory of God solves several problems. Classifying the star as being "purely miraculous" places it in the realm beyond what can be proven or disproved, offering a supposedly irrefutable explanation for the story. But one could also ask, "If the star and its explanation were completely supernatural, how did the accumulated wisdom and technical astronomical knowledge of the Near Eastern wise men play any meaningful role in the story?" The traditional concept of the "Star of Bethlehem" as a supernatural visual guide does not answer this question. In fact, the traditional story does not answer several important questions.

The concept of visually following a star would have been a novel idea to all ancient astronomers. In reality, one cannot follow a normal star anywhere. Stars rise in the east and set in the west like the sun and moon. Ancient astronomers might have thought of using a star to get their bearings, but they would never have conceived of visually following it. Many Christians have assumed that the wise men must have followed the star like the Israelites followed the pillar of

cloud in the desert during the Exodus from Egypt. However, the Israelites received specific instructions about following the pillar of cloud. We have no indications that the wise men ever received such instructions concerning the star. How would the men have known that they were to follow a star? Following a star would not have been something that they would have normally done.

Also, why would it have been necessary for the wise men to have a star as a visual guide? The way to Judaea from the east was well-known. Annually, thousands of Jewish pilgrims from Mesopotamia and Persia attended the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles in Jerusalem. The wise men were apparently connected with Jews and the Jewish scriptures in one manner or another. If God revealed to the men that they were to follow a star to Judaea, then why did He not simply say, “Go to Judaea and there I will help you find the Messiah.” No star would have been necessary. In Judaea, the men got to Bethlehem through Herod’s intervention. The star did not inform or instruct the men to go to Bethlehem. In addition, Bethlehem was a small town. Even by going door to door and visiting every family in the town the men could have found the child in a matter of days, not weeks or months. Why would one have needed a star to show the way to the Messiah?

One could also ask: “When was the star visible?” The ancient Greek Church Fathers thought that the star as an angel or the “shekinah” glory of God visually went ahead of the wise men during the daytime, not at night. Early Christians were aware of the difficulties and hazards of following an object in the darkness. John Chrysostom, in the late fourth-century AD, conceived of the star as a brilliant angel that was brighter than the sun.⁵ Chrysostom speculated that the shining angel led the wise men during the daytime from their homeland all the way to Jerusalem and eventually on

to Bethlehem. From his perspective, the Magi’s visit to the child’s home would have probably happened during the daylight hours.

In our day, it is generally assumed that the men visually followed the star at night. However, no explanation is given about how the men would have navigated on rocky roads or through deserts in the darkness. Despite the superior night vision of some animals, the men would have been unable to see the road except on moonlit nights. Are we to assume that the star also lit their way over “moor and mountain, field and fountain,” as the old hymn tells us? Matthew’s text itself does not say that the star gave light on the Magi’s path. The widespread idea that the star was extremely bright may also be completely unfounded. Matthew does not inform us about the star’s brightness.

The Greek Church Fathers taught that the star
visually went ahead of the wise men
during the daytime, not at night.

It would be reasonable to assume that any unusual, bright object in the sky could have gotten the attention of thousands, if not millions, of people. If the star had shown a ray of light down onto a specific house in Bethlehem, it is evident that several hundred or even several thousand people might have found their way to the location. However, to avoid the problems involved in having vast crowds interested in the star, many Christian teachers have assumed that the star was invisible to everyone, except the Magi. However, Matthew’s account does not clearly affirm that the star pointed out a particular house in Bethlehem by a beam of light. Nei-

ther does Matthew indicate that the star was uniquely visible only to the wise men.

Even very early in Church history, most Christians and skeptics assumed that Matthew mentioned the wise men “going into a house” (Matthew 2:11) to affirm that the star was directly above a certain house. John Chrysostom thought that the star was finally located within meters of Jesus’ head in Bethlehem. Such ideas are reflected in artwork and Christmas cards. However, Matthew’s text does not inform us about the height of the star above the place where the young child was located. When Matthew mentions that the Magi “went into a house” (εις την οικιαν) to see the child Jesus, the apostle was not necessarily trying to indicate anything about the exact position of the star precisely above or near a specific house.

The wise men did not present their gifts or bow down before Jesus in a public setting. In Matthew’s Gospel events that took place in private circumstances were sometimes specifically mentioned as having taken place in homes. By men-

tioning the Magi’s entering into a house, culturally Matthew simply may have been underlining the private nature of the meeting. Jesus often gave further insight to his disciples concerning his teachings in private homes. See other examples from Matthew’s Gospel: Mt. 13:36-43, 17:24-27, as well as Mt. 17:19-21 and the parallel passage in Mark 9:28-29.

Identifying the Star

Although the Bible affirms certain traditional names of heavenly objects, it also contains several firm statements against astrology.⁶ How would the wise men have been able to identify the star without using astrology? Was there another method? A major problem with the traditional story concerns the first identification of the star. Before the men ever traveled to Judaea, how did the Magi know that the star (angel or otherwise) had anything to do with the Jewish Messiah? This question is usually overlooked by those who support the supernatural explanation of the star. One could certainly evoke a vision or dream that may have given the wise men an understanding of the star, but this would be an assumption. We have no evidence that the men identified the star with the Messiah through a dream or vision.

Why did the men think that any object in the sky had something to do with the Messiah? An explanation will be given later concerning the star as a celestial sign. However, historically Christians have often tried to explain the star by citing the passage in Numbers 24:15-25 about a star that would appear. Balaam’s famous prophecy reads:

“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.”



Image: John Chrysostom (c. AD 349-407) was one of the great preachers of his age. He speculated that the star was an angel who went ahead of the magi, visually leading the wise men to the exact spot where the young child was located.

There is the mention of a star in the text, but it bears no relation to a normal star. Balaam was talking about a person, a bright, shining ruler, who would “come out of Jacob / Israel.” King David was obviously the bright, shining leader who accomplished the prophecy in detail. In 2 Samuel 8:1-15 David’s exploits are enumerated, illustrating how he fulfilled the prophecy. David thoroughly “bashed through the forehead of Moab and tore down various sons of Seth.” King David lived several centuries after Balaam gave the prophecy, qualifying him as one who was not chronologically “near” to Balaam’s time (See Numbers 24:17a).

The Jewish understanding of the prophecy is underlined by the fact that the leader of the Jewish revolt in AD 132-135, Simon ben Kosiba, was renamed by Rabbi Akiva as Bar Kochba, meaning “son of the star.” The renaming of Simon associated him directly with King David. It was hoped that Bar Kochba would bring deliverance from Israel’s enemies. In the minds of many Jews in the first and second centuries AD, the prophecy was seen as symbolic of the Messiah and Israel’s relationship with Rome.⁷

Many early Church Fathers latched onto Balaam’s prophecy as an explanation concerning the Star of Bethlehem. However, in its context and content, Balaam’s prophecy had nothing to do with a natural or supernatural star over Bethlehem. In addition, it is evident that Jesus never “bashed through” Moab’s forehead. Neither was Jesus known to have been involved in military activities related to Edom and Amalek (Numbers 24:18-20). However, David was involved in all those activities. As a descendant of King David, Jesus certainly was a “son of the star.” We now know that Jesus, the son of David, has become the “bright morning star” announcing the dawning of God’s new world. However, this insight followed Jesus’ birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection; the wise men would not have had such an understanding.

Did the Wise Men Expect a Star?

It is unlikely that Matthew’s wise men or others were waiting for a natural or supernatural stellar event to accompany the Messiah’s appearing. No biblical prophecy specifically indicated that any natural or supernatural star would appear to signal the Messiah’s coming. Therefore, one needs to explain why the men came to associate any star with the promised Jewish king. Apparently, some aspects of the stellar manifestations themselves must have given the wise men insights concerning the arrival of the Messiah. Later, it will be demonstrated that the star’s role was not to serve as a visual guide. However, the star did announce the coming of the Messiah.

From the paragraphs above it becomes clear that there are some unspoken, unproven and unprovable assumptions at the core of the purely supernatural concept of the star. These assumptions may or may not be correct. The miraculous view of the star raises some serious questions that merit explanation.

No biblical prophecy specifically indicated that any natural or supernatural star would appear to signal the Messiah’s coming.

PART 2

A Key Text - An Alternate Literal Reading

Explanations of the Star of Bethlehem have risen and fallen based on the following text:

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

This passage has been interpreted to mean that the star went visually in front of the wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The Eastern Church Fathers thought that the wise men had visually followed the star all the way from the east to Judaea and then on to Bethlehem. However, these ideas may not be what Matthew had in mind.

One way of understanding Matthew’s text would be to look at other passages in Matthew, which use the same keywords. Matthew uses the Greek verb, προάγω (proago), meaning “to precede / to go ahead of.”⁸ This word is found in other passages in the book of Matthew. In Chapter 14:22-25 we read:

“Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead (προάγειν)⁹ of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the

mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.”

Jesus sent the disciples “on ahead” of him. However, he did not follow their boat as if he were following a beacon or guide. Jesus went in a different direction up onto a mountain. He only arrived at the boat much later. In this text, the verb “proago” is used to indicate that the disciples were on their way to a particular place. Later Jesus eventually met them on the lake. The disciples were in the process of “going on ahead” of Jesus to another destination.

During the last supper, Jesus made the following statement: *“But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you (προάξω)¹⁰ to Galilee”* (Matthew 26:32). After Jesus was raised from the dead, an angel appeared to some of his followers and said to them: *“Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you (προάγει)¹¹ into Galilee, there you will see Him...”* (Mt. 28:7).

These passages use forms of the Greek verb, προάγω (proago).¹² It is obvious that the disciples did not follow Jesus visually to Galilee in the same sense that one usually thinks about the wise men following the star. Jesus indicated that after his resurrection he was going to arrive in Galilee ahead of the disciples. On their way to Galilee, the disciples were not taking visual and directional guidance from Jesus. The disciples simply arrived chronologically in Galilee after Jesus already had arrived there. Jesus had “preceded” them there.

Below: The Greek words: “the star which they had seen in the east...”

ὁ ἀστὴρ ὃν εἶδον
ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ

In Matthew 2:9, the star “went before” until “having arrived,” “it stood.” The imperfect¹³ “went before” took place previous to the two aorist¹⁴ verbs “having arrived” and “it stood,” both of which indicate completed action. Following the order of events in the text, the Magi’s “seeing” the star in the following verse (Mt. 2:10), may have happened only after the men had already arrived in Bethlehem itself. If one reads the text in this way, Matthew was simply affirming that the star, which previously had been seen in the east, was somehow remarkably present in the skies above Bethlehem after the men finally arrived in the town. From this perspective, Matthew was never referring to the star as a visible guide that played a role during the journey. Therefore, “seeing” the star had to do with a renewed appreciation of the star’s symbolic significance over Bethlehem, not just visibly seeing an object.

The words, “and behold the star, which they had seen in the east,” send the reader back several months in the past to the former situation in the east. It was from the east¹⁵ that the star “went on ahead of the Magi.” It “preceded” the men to the skies above Judaea from where the Magi had been before. They had been in the eastern lands, most likely in Babylonia in modern Iraq. Matthew apparently was not indicating anything about the star visually going ahead of the men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as a directional guide.

A Possible Scenario: After having seen the star in their homeland, the wise men went to Judaea. At every moment during their journey, the men traveled during the daytime like normal travelers. The way to Judaea was well-known. They were not looking to the star for visual guidance because the star’s purpose was to give a message. The star was a sign concerning the Messiah. It was not a guide. Over a period of months, the star came to be positioned well above the men’s heads during a portion of each night. In the days

before the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, the star drew near to the zenith in the nighttime skies above Bethlehem. However, the star arrived there each night by rising in the east and then climbing up above of the heads of the wise men.

When the Magi finally arrived in Bethlehem (having traveled there in the daytime), the wise men unexpectedly concluded that the star had again become a celestial sign concerning the Messiah. This realization happened at night. The star literally “preceded” the men to the skies above Bethlehem because it was waiting for them when they arrived. In a similar way Jesus also “preceded” the disciples to Galilee after his resurrection and then the men saw him there. It is clear that the disciples never visually followed Jesus to Galilee after his resurrection. Likewise, the Magi never visually followed the star anywhere.

The symbolic nature of the star was all important. While the men were in their homeland, the star signaled the coming of the awaited king, the “Righteous One, the Messiah.” Later over Bethlehem, the star affirmed the Messiah’s presence in the town. In each case, the star informed the wise men about the Messiah. The star was not giving directional guidance. The star was a herald of the Messiah.

To better understand how the star literally “preceded” the wise men to the skies above Judaea see Appendix 3 on page 51. That section is entitled “The Story of the Lamp Repairman and the Great Sale.”

Matthew did not refer to the star as an object that gave directional guidance, but rather as a sign that announced the Messiah.

Part 3

Chronology: Dating the Birth of Jesus and the Star

For centuries, there have been problems with specifically dating the birth of Jesus. Even the year of his birth remains a subject of debate. Ancient dates are not necessarily easy to calculate. The present calendar terms BC, and AD were only adopted many centuries after the birth of Jesus. Some errors were made in the date calculation process. Therefore, we now have the odd situation of indicating Christ's birth in the years "BC" instead of in a more logical phrasing "in the year of our Lord" (Anno Domini) AD 1.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, many people believed that Jesus was born sometime during 3 BC or 2 BC. Some early Christian authors indicated that Jesus was born in the 41st or 42nd year of the reign of Augustus Caesar. While the Church Fathers sometimes may have been mistaken, they also deserve respect. They may have more to offer us than we would expect.

For various reasons, which go beyond the central focus of this short book, many Bibles, commentaries, and godly preachers in the last four centuries have used a 4 BC date for the death of Herod the Great. This dating was first proposed by a Polish monk named Laurentius Suslyga in AD 1605. Suslyga's ideas were founded on a series of logical assumptions, but some of his ideas have been seriously called into question in recent decades. If one makes different assumptions about the period of Herod's death and the birth of Jesus,



Dates given for the birth of Jesus by several Church Fathers:¹⁶

AD 130-202	Ireneaus	4/3 BC
AD 150-215	Clement of Alexandria	3/2 BC
AD 160-225	Tertullian	3/2 BC
AD 170-240	Julius Africanus	3/2 BC
AD 170-236	Hippolytus of Rome	3/2 BC
AD 185-253	Origen	3/2 BC
AD 263-339	Eusebius of Caesarea	3/2 BC

then the chronology takes on another aspect. All the dating schemes concerning Herod's reign are heavily influenced by one's initial assumptions.

The suggested spring 4 BC date for Herod's death has led many people to search for the famous star in the years previous to 4 BC. Several serious astronomical propositions have been put forward concerning the star in the years from 7 BC to 5 BC. However, a 4 BC date for the death of Herod does not solve all the chronological problems. It may create sever-



Photo: A panoramic view of Bethlehem looking toward the west and northwest. Old Bethlehem is situated on a hill with significant drop-offs on several sides.

al other serious historical, factual, and biblical difficulties. Some of our sources of information also apparently contain errors, which could lead one to false conclusions.

There is significant evidence that Herod was named king of Judah in 39 BC instead of 40 BC as is often assumed. Herod supposedly reigned 37 years. If Herod were named king in 39 BC, then his death in 4 BC would seem rather doubtful. There are only 34.5 years between the early fall of 39 BC and the spring of 4 BC.¹⁷

In recent times several scholars have sought again to affirm the beginning of Herod's reign in the later part of 39 BC and his death in early 1 BC.¹⁸ Jesus would have been born in late 3 BC or early 2 BC, at least one year preceding Herod's death. This booklet uses the 1 BC date for Herod's death. From the late summer or early fall of 39 BC to January of 1 BC there are 37 years and four or five months. Much more detailed information about the dating of Herod's reign and Jesus' birth is available in the author's book, *The Lion Led the Way*, and on the website: www.star-of-bethlehem.info. See also Appendices 1 and 2 about the chronology questions on pages 50-52.

December 25th, the Correct Date?

The December 25 date for the birth of Jesus has a complicated history. It is often assumed and widely proclaimed that the date was established to replace a pagan celebration; however, on close examination, this most likely was not the case. Indications that Jesus was born in December or January are found in the writings of the following Church Fathers: Theophilus (AD 115-181), Tertullian (AD 160-225), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215), Hippolytus of Rome (AD 170-235). Others like Eusebius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, and Augustine, believed it firmly.¹⁹ Christians in the early centuries of the Church often thought that Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb at Passover and that he died on the same day several decades later. In many historic denominations, the Feast of the Annunciation is still celebrated at Easter (Passover), commemorating Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah.²⁰

Passover often falls about the same time as the spring equinox, and in the early Christian centuries, the Roman spring equinox was officially established on March 25th. Perhaps only based on this equinox date, Tertullian and others thought that Jesus had been crucified on March 25th.

Their calculations were somehow in error because March 25 was not a possible date for Passover or the crucifixion in any year from AD 27 to AD 35. Based on these assumptions and calculations about Jesus' conception and death, many apparently thought that the Messiah's birth would have been on the date of the former winter solstice on December 25, nine months after his conception. A rough calculation may have set the date. In 3 BC, Passover could have fallen on March 30, and a normal pregnancy is about 38 to 39 weeks long (40 weeks after the last normal menstrual cycle). This would have placed Jesus' birth on or near the December 25th date. If Jesus were born exactly 40 weeks after Passover, then he would have been born in early January in 2 BC. However, the length of pregnancies can vary.

The traditional December 25 date
may not be the actual birth date of Jesus;
however, it may not be far from the correct date.

The traditional December-25th date may not be the actual birth date of Jesus; however, it may not be far from to the correct date. Many Christians in the early centuries of the Church celebrated the Messiah's birth in early January. Even today, large numbers of believers celebrate Epiphany (the visit of the wise men) on the 6th of January. Historically in several denominations, this date has been linked to Jesus' birth, the visit of the wise men and his baptism. The January-6th date may indeed be extremely close to the actual date of the visit of the wise men. Their visit took place, perhaps one year after Jesus' birth. Events in the heavens in

3/2 BC also could lead one to think that the wise men made their visit to Bethlehem at the end of December 2 BC or the beginning of January 1 BC.

A period of one year between the birth and the visit of the wise men could perhaps explain how the two traditions of the wise men and the shepherds came to be combined. The events happened at the same time of the year, but at a one-year interval. However, for most people following the Church's liturgical calendar, the two events would have appeared to have been at the same time. The shepherds were present at the time of Jesus' birth, but not the Magi. Winters are not harsh in the land of Israel. A wintertime census and birth were entirely possible.²¹ The wise men appeared much later after Jesus had been circumcised and presented at the temple at least 40 days after the birth (Leviticus 12:1-4). One early church tradition indicates that as a young child Jesus stood beside his seated mother when the wise men made their visit.²² A one-year-old child can stand, especially if he can hold onto objects or people.

The family had apparently been established in Bethlehem for about one year. Joseph even seems to have desired to return to Bethlehem after being in Egypt, but he was afraid to go back there due to Herod's son Archelaus. Joseph only took his family to Nazareth after a dream (Matthew 2:19-23). Of course, this was well after they had accomplished everything according to the law (Luke 2:39).²³ It is probable that Jesus was already about one year old when the wise men visited Bethlehem in December or January of 2/1 BC. Josephus mentions a pledge of allegiance to Emperor Augustus and to King Herod which took place a little over a year before Herod's death (Antiquities of the Jews 17.2.4). At least one ancient figure identifies this pledge with the census mentioned by Luke (Paulus Orosius, *Historiae Adversus Paganos*, VI.22.7 and VII.2.16).

Photo: A view of Bethlehem on the hills northwest of the former Herodium palace / fortress about five kilometers from the modern town.



Modern Messianic Jews and the Birth of Jesus

Some modern messianic Jews have made efforts to develop a supposedly more Jewish approach to Jesus' birth. They do this by rejecting the traditional dates for Christmas and proposing that Jesus was born in September during one of the Jewish festivals or holy days. On the surface, the idea is attractive. However, there are good reasons to question this approach. A significant problem is posed because there are no ancient Church traditions connecting the fall festivals and appointed times with the birth of Jesus. There is a tradition connecting John the Baptist's conception with the fall, but not Jesus' birth. One could ask, "How could heretical texts like the Gospel of Judas and others be preserved while the slightest evidence of Jesus' birth on the Day of Trumpets or during the Feast of Tabernacles disappeared completely?"

Such ideas are often connected to chronological assumptions and calculations about Zechariah's temple service (Luke 1:5-25) and the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary. However, no one knows if both Elizabeth or Mary became pregnant immediately after Gabriel gave his messages. In Luke 1:20, Gabriel simply says that Elizabeth's pregnancy and the birth of John would be "in their proper time" (εις τὸν καιρὸν αὐτῶν). Gabriel did not say that Elizabeth would undoubtedly be pregnant immediately. Elizabeth's pregnancy may have followed the announcement by one, two, three, or even perhaps six months.

According to the Torah, all Jewish men were supposed to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd of the month of Tishrei. To participate in the Roman census, some men from the northern tribes, but who were living in the Jerusalem area would have had to make the journey from the capital to northern Israel to return to the "land of their ancestors." However, such a trip would have been impossible since all the men were supposed to have been in Jerusalem for the festival. Therefore, Jesus was probably not born during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The idea that the Church somehow forgot the right date of Jesus' birth might be partly right. Because of their association with overeating, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity, birthday celebrations were not encouraged among early Christians. However, it is evident that even if the Church did forget the actual date of Jesus' birth, it was not because of a desire to suppress Jewish roots connected to his conception and birth. A very widespread early Church tradition indicated that Jesus was conceived at Passover. Can one find a conception date for Jesus that is more profoundly and uniquely Jewish than Passover? Most modern Christians, including many Jewish messianic believers, have often forgotten that Passover is usually about nine months before Christmas.

Despite what one might be led to believe because of the commonly used BC / AD dating system, the Church Fathers and most authorities before AD 1600 thought that Jesus had been born in 3 BC or 2 BC. They also believed that Herod had died sometime after Jesus' birth, possibly in 1 BC. According to Josephus, Herod's death was preceded by an eclipse of the moon. The two primary candidates for this event are a partial eclipse in March of 4 BC or the total eclipse of the moon on the night of January 9/10 in 1 BC.

In the theory of the star presented here, Jesus' conception would have been at Passover in the spring of 3 BC, followed by his birth in December 3 BC or January of 2 BC. This dating follows Church tradition, which places Jesus' conception at Passover. Herod's death would have been toward the end of January in 1 BC. A traditional Jewish date for Herod's death is the second of the month of Shevat. According to the Jewish lunisolar calendar, in 1 BC the second day of Shevat was probably on January 27/28.

An extended series of royal celestial signs in 3 BC and 2 BC allowed the wise men to identify the "star" and understand its significance concerning the Jewish Messiah. The earliest manifestations of the star happened about 18 months before the visit of the Magi to Judaea in late December 2 BC or early January of 1 BC. The Magi's visit probably took place about one year after Jesus' birth. The wise men thought that the child had been born sometime well before their visit. Herod executed the children less than two years old in accordance with the things that the wise men said about the appearance of the star (Matthew 2:16).

Note: Appendix 4 on pages 54 and 55, points out problems with some popular messianic ideas connecting Jesus' birth and various speculative end-times scenarios to the constellation Virgo.



Above: Date palms grow in the garden behind the chapel at the Shepherd's Field site. This is a strong testimony that the winters are fairly mild in Judaea. Date palms do not grow at all in cold climates with rigorous winters (Author's photo).



Kochav, the Hebrew word for star, can also be associated with planets.

PART 4

Understanding the Prophetic Context

Hundreds of thousands of Jews lived in Mesopotamia and Iran during the years immediately before Jesus' birth. Babylonian astronomers could have been in contact with Jews in the east. Aramaic and Greek were spoken all over the Middle East making communication possible. In addition, the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint, LXX) would have been known among the Jews and learned Greek speakers in Babylonia.²⁴ Some oral translations of the Old Testament texts in Aramaic may have been familiar to the Magi.²⁵ Aramaic speakers like the Magi may have also understood some portions of the Hebrew Bible.

Several prophetic passages from the Old Testament may have been important in interpreting the events involving the star. Babylonian astronomers could have known about these texts through their interactions with Jews. The ancient prophecies of the Messiah include a passage from the book of Genesis.

In Egypt, about two thousand years before the birth of the Messiah, the Patriarch Jacob announced the future concerning his son, Judah, who was referred to as a young lion. In the prophecy, a person named the "Shiloh" is mentioned. The "Shiloh" refers to the "person who has the right to the ruler's staff" (ruler's scepter). A scepter signifies dominion, power and authority. This person would have the role and responsibility of being the leader of the Jewish people. It is also mentioned that his rule would involve the obedience of various peoples. This is the earliest prophecy specifically



Photo: The land of Egypt, where Jacob spoke out the words found in Genesis 49.

dealing with a kingly role for an individual who would later be recognized as the Messiah. Jacob's words are in Genesis 49:8-10:

"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; . . . He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

A significant star named Regulus, which was associated with royalty among the Mesopotamians for well over 2,000 years, is found in the lion constellation, Leo. The Sumerians and Babylonians called the star LUGAL or Sharru, both words meaning "king." The tribe of Judah has historically been associated with the constellation. It is very probable that the constellation played a role in the Magi's experience.

Psalm 89:1-37 is an important text concerning the Davidic Covenant. In the Psalm, God made it clear that he would raise up a king to sit on David's throne forever. Here are several verses:

"I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations." (vv. 3-4).

"I have found David My servant; With My holy oil I have anointed him" (v. 20).

"He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' I also shall make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (vv. 26-27).

The heavens are mentioned several times in this Psalm, but a passage in verses 35 to 37 is of particular importance in the interpretation of several celestial events in 3 BC and 2 BC:

"Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful."

The "witness" concerns both the sun and the moon together, not simply the moon alone. Together they testify that the Messiah's throne will endure. In the coming pages we will see that the sun and moon were key elements in a number of celestial signs concerning kingship.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 and a nearly identical passage in chapter 33:14-26 provides us with a Jewish vision of a righteous king who would reign over the whole earth.

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely, and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'"

According to the passages, David's descendant would do justice and righteousness in the land. His name would be

"The Lord our Righteousness." In Hebrew, one of the brightest visible planets is named Sedeq (Tzedek), meaning "righteousness."

The early Christians referred to Jesus as the "Righteous One," the righteous king of Jeremiah's prophecy. Speaking to Saul (Paul) in Damascus, Ananias said, *"The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth" (Acts 22:14).*

Some other texts that may have influenced the Magi are mentioned in the notes.²⁶ However, a major prophecy found in the book of Daniel may have shaped the thinking and experience of Matthew's wise men in a profound way.

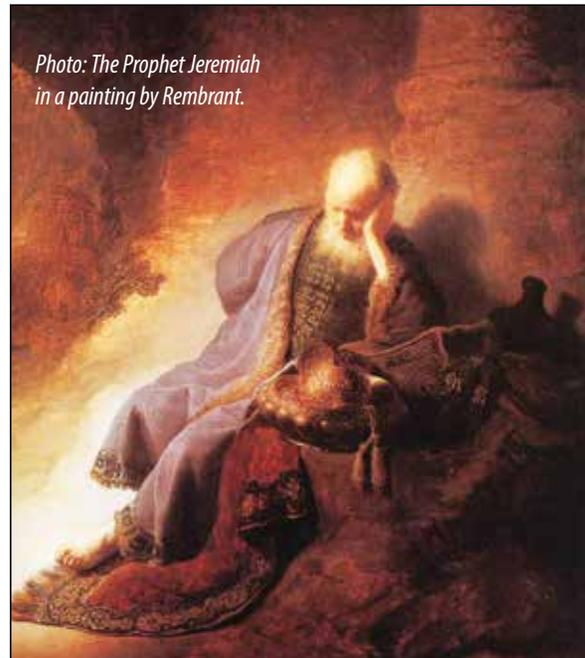


Photo: The Prophet Jeremiah in a painting by Rembrandt.

Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 "Sevens"

Daniel is a key figure in the prophecies concerning the Messiah. His prophecies are cited in the New Testament. The "Son of Man" passage in Daniel 7:13-14 was a key text in Jesus' condemnation by the Jewish elders during his trial before his crucifixion. Jesus, himself, quotes part of the following passage to the high priest before his condemnation:

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

Later in Daniel chapter 9, another prophecy gives us some insight into the coming of God's "Righteous One." The Messiah was to accomplish several tasks. His appearing and activities were connected to a mysterious prophecy concerning a period of 70 "sevens" (sometimes translated as weeks of years).

"Seventy 'sevens' have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place (some translate the most Holy One - the Messiah). So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens"; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." (Daniel 9:24-26)



**Everlasting
righteousness**
Son of Man ...

**A Kingdom which
shall endure
forever**

Daniel's prophecy says very clearly that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens." What was this period of 69 "sevens"? The Jewish system of Sabbatical years based on periods of seven lunisolar years would seem to be related to this prophecy. It may be that Matthew's wise men came to understand Daniel's prophecy of the "sevens" as they were observing the series of royal celestial signs, which will be described later in this book.

While numerous commentators and researchers have attempted to solve the mystery of the “sevens,” none have given a very convincing explanation concerning the sequences of numbers. Why were seven “sevens” mentioned along with 62 “sevens”? Was there a separation between the two sets of numbers? If so, how much was the separation?

Here, it is proposed that there was a separation period between the two sets of “sevens.” By the time that the Messiah made his appearance the separation amounted to an entire Jubilee period of 49 years.

The decree, which began the prophecy (Daniel 9:25), seems to have been Cyrus’ order to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem sometime after the Medio-Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BC. (See Josephus, Antiquities, 11.1.1-3 and Isaiah 44:26-28, 45:13.) The year 533/532 BC may have begun the first Sabbatical cycle after Cyrus’ decree according to one of the main Sabbatical year schemes.*

The wise men probably discovered Daniel’s prophecy through interactions with the numerous Jews in Babylonia. The Magi may have counted backwards through the Sabbatical cycle to the first cycle following Cyrus’ decree.

They could have realized that the timeline was too long by 49 years, and then concluded that the separation between the seven “sevens” and the 62 “sevens” must have been a Jubilee period. For the Jews, a Jubilee was highly symbolic of liberation and forgiveness. Therefore it is logical and appropriate that a Jubilee could have made up the separation between the periods of “sevens.”

More information about other possible connections to Daniel 9:24-27 will be given later at the end of this book.

The 69 “Sevens”

539 BC : Medio-Persian Conquest of Babylonia

538 BC or possibly 537 BC : Cyrus’ decree

533/532 BC : Beginning of the seven “sevens”

↓ **7 x 7 = 49 Years**

485/484 BC : End of the seven “sevens”

484/483 BC : Beginning separation period.

↓ **Jubilee = 49 Years = 7 cycles**

436/435 BC : End separation period.

435/434 BC : The beginning of the 62 “sevens” of years.

The sequence lasted 434 years.

↓ **62 x 7 = 434 Years**

2/1 BC : Last year of the 62 “sevens” of years.

Jesus’ birth was in December 3 BC or January of 2 BC, perhaps a year or more before the visit of the Magi in the winter of 2/1 BC. The Jewish year 2/1 BC, beginning in Nisan, would have been Jesus’ first full year as the Son of God (King of Israel). This may partly explain the Magi’s question: “Where is he who is born King of the Jews?”

* The timeline above uses the Wacholder dates for the Sabbatical year sequence. The Sabbatical dating scheme by Zuckermann could also apply. It would end in 3/2 BC. More information is given in the author’s book *The Lion Led the Way*.

PART 5

Eastern Astronomy

Wise men arrived in Jerusalem. However, from the text, we are not informed about their numbers, names, ethnic origins or religious affiliations. While various names and ethnicities have been proposed in the traditions concerning the Magi, we can not be sure about their accuracy. According to some traditions, there were three wise men, others say six to 12 wise men were in the group. From Matthew's account, we do not know if the men were Zoroastrians, Babylonians, Arabs or from other backgrounds. It is not impossible that at least some of the men could have been ethnically Jewish. The group could have been from a mixed ethnic and religious background. In this book, it is assumed that the wise men were probably Babylonians. However, they obviously must have had a profound association with Judaism. Otherwise, they would never have embarked on a quest to find the Jewish Messiah. All of the men apparently wanted to submit themselves to God's appointed messianic king.

The wise men arrived after the birth of Jesus. This is implied by the question "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?" The phrase is in the past tense. The wise men believed that the Messiah had already been born before their arrival in Judaea. As indicated previously, contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not indicate that the shepherds and the wise men were together at the time of the birth of Jesus. The wise men came much later.

Despite the commonly accepted idea, Matthew's account does not tell us that the wise men were kings. It is fairly doubtful that they were actual kings. In the ancient world



Above: The Babylonian lunisolar calendar was very similar to the Jewish calendar.

and even today, a king or a group of kings, visiting a far away country, would be housed and fed for the duration of their visit by the local monarch. A state visit would have obliged Herod to extend hospitality to any visiting royalty even as it would be necessary today. In Matthew's account, the wise men were Herod's guests only when they were secretly called to come to the palace. Apparently, the wise men were not kings on a state visit.²⁷ The entire group of wise men and their servants and guards may have been no more than 15 to 25 people.

The Greek writer Strabo mentions several of the Babylonian astronomers in his book *Geography* (published about AD 20). Such famous men would have certainly been known to the Magi:

... The astronomers are divided into different groups, which hold to various different dogmas about the same subjects. And

the mathematicians make mention of some of these men; as, for example, Cidenas (Kidinnu), Naburianus (Nabû-rimannu), Sudines and Seleukos (Seleucus of Seleucia), (Strabo, Geography 16.5-6).

Kidinnu (fourth-century BC), mentioned in Strabo's text, may have been involved in developing a fairly precise manner for calculating the position and orbit of the moon. Seleucus of Seleucia on the Tigris (second-century BC) is credited with being one of the first persons to attribute the tides to the interaction of the earth with the moon. He also further developed the idea of a sun-centered solar system, which had been proposed by the Greek astronomer Aristarchus. It is even possible that some or all of the wise men had this same opinion. They would have certainly been aware that the earth is round. That was well-known in the ancient world. (See the author's book *The Lion Led the Way* for more details.)

Modern people often completely underestimate the technical abilities of Matthew's wise men.

Very little is known about Persian Zoroastrian astronomy before about AD 250.²⁸ It is here assumed that Matthew's Magi were Babylonians and not Zoroastrians. The rather spurious testimony of Marco Polo, who supposedly saw the Magi's uncorrupted bodies in a tomb in Saveh, Persia (near modern Tehran) is rejected in the theory presented here.²⁹

In the Greek Septuagint text of the Old Testament, the word "magi" only appears in the book of Daniel (1:20; 2:2, 2:10, 2:27; 4:7; 5:7, 5:11, 5:15). None of the magi cited in the book of Daniel would have been Zoroastrians from the Iranian plateau, they were Babylonians. It would have been

completely normal for Matthew, as a Jewish believer in the first-century AD using the Septuagint, to refer to certain Babylonians as magi.

A great deal is known about Babylonian astronomy in the centuries before Christ. It is very probable that the wise men came from the region of Babylonia. The photographic plates, transliterations, and translations of still surviving cuneiform Babylonian astronomical documents are contained in 3,500+ pages of material published during the last 30 years.³⁰

People in the modern world often completely underestimate the technical abilities of Matthew's wise men. However, Babylonian astronomy was very highly developed by the time of Jesus' birth. Babylonian astronomers used a precise lunisolar calendar, which allowed them to keep accurate and detailed records of astronomical events over hundreds of years. Based on their records and other calculations, the Babylonians were able to construct fairly accurate predictive almanacs that described the cyclical movements of the heavenly bodies. This gave them exact dates for many astronomical events well over a year in advance. They also understood the cyclical motions of the planets that take place over many decades. One recent discovery of a Babylonian mathematical astronomy text has astounded the scientific community because of its unexpected advanced nature. Similar mathematical ability was not witnessed again until the Middle Ages.³¹

The basis of our modern systems of hours, degrees, minutes and seconds used for measuring time and astronomical distances was laid down by the ancient Mesopotamians, who used a numbering system based on the number 60. (The Babylonians measured time using water-clocks.) Babylonian astronomical concepts were passed on to the Greeks and the Egyptians as well as the Indians, Zoroastrian Persians, and the Arabs.

PART 6

A Jewish and Babylonian Candidate for the Star

While most researchers and writers concerning the Star of Bethlehem have concentrated their efforts in the skies over Bethlehem, a different approach is proposed here. Identifying the star becomes easier when one focuses on discovering the event or events that may have led the Magi to declare, “*We have seen his star in the east*” (Matthew 2:2). The actual mechanics of the incident at Bethlehem can be worked out if one can identify the stellar events, which initially attracted the attention of the Magi in the first place.

The Star in the East

In recent decades, there has been much speculation that Matthew was relating precise astronomical information concerning a “heliacal rising of a star,” in his text when the Magi declared: “We have seen his star in the east.” A heliacal rising of a star is its first visibility before dawn, lasting only minutes before being obscured by the solar glare. Such risings were often associated with celestial omens or signs in some cultures, notably among the Babylonians. Some Bibles even translate the words as “We have seen the star at its rising.” However, the phrase “in the east” may have been simply referring to where the men were, when they understood that a star was signaling the coming of the Messiah. Even though the “heliacal rising” approach to the phrase “in the east” has become popular, some influential translators of ancient astronomical and astrological texts have rejected it. Matthew certainly was not using the regular technical terms

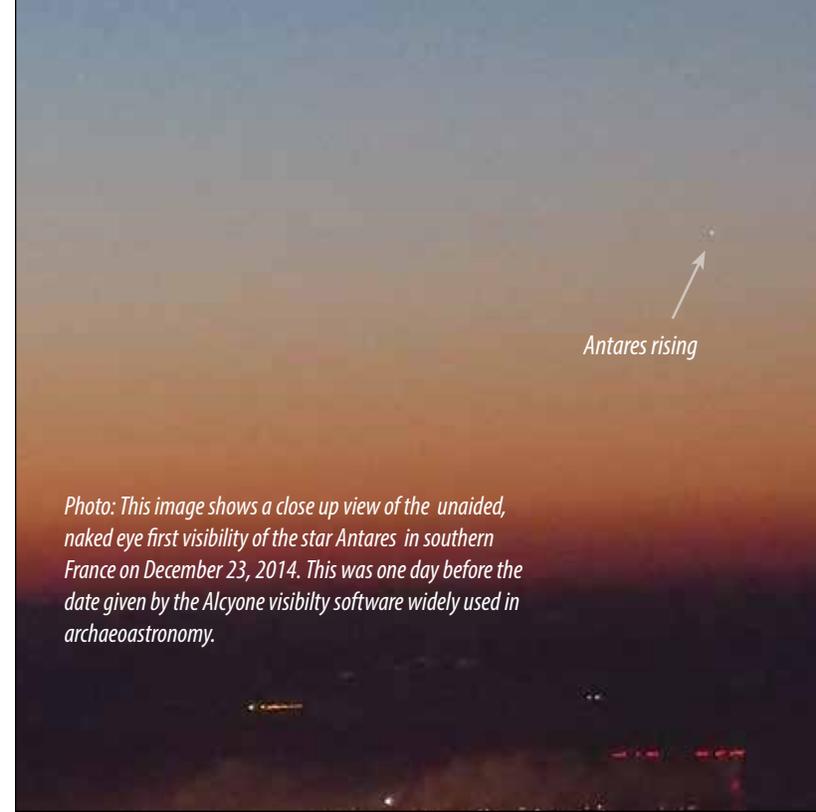


Photo: This image shows a close up view of the unaided, naked eye first visibility of the star Antares in southern France on December 23, 2014. This was one day before the date given by the Alcyone visibility software widely used in archaeoastronomy.

for a heliacal rising, although some experts concede that he may have been using layman’s terms.³²

In 1 Clement 5:5-6, one of the rare examples of still existing documents from the first-century AD that uses the exact same formula, there is a clear example of “in the East” (Greek dative, singular) as a geographical area, not a heliacal rising. One could also ask, “If a heliacal rising was implied, why was this not obvious to the Greek-speaking Church Fathers?” For centuries, Greek-Orthodox scholars have consistently taught that the star seen by the Magi was a bright shining angel, without any reference to a heliacal rising of a star or planet.

While a heliacal rising is important in the theory presented here, the traditional translation “in the East” is being used in this book. (See A. Barnes, J. Gill, A. T. Robertson).

Principal Assumptions of the “Star as a Sign Perspective”

- The star was a sign connected to the Messiah’s appearing. It informed the wise men of the Messiah’s coming.
- The wise men never visually followed the star anywhere at anytime. The star never became a directional guide, its role was to inform, not to guide.
- Time and reflection were necessary for the wise men to understand the star’s message.
- The star became symbolic in a context involving other stars, planets as well as the sun and moon.
- The star was a natural celestial object. However, God’s remarkable ancient planning was a striking aspect of the star’s appearing. The heavenly signs surrounding the Messiah’s coming seem to have been arranged since the time of creation.
- The star was not the brightest heavenly object. It never had a tail. The star was not overly spectacular while it was manifest in the east or above Judaea.
- The star was symbolically significant, but it did not indicate the specific day or time of the Messiah’s birth. The star announced the coming of a messianic king. Above Bethlehem, the star affirmed the Messiah’s presence in the town.
- The wise men went to Bethlehem and made a careful search in order to find the Messiah’s family. They did not need the star to give them directions to arrive at the place where the young child was located. However, the Magi did need to be informed that the Messiah had come. That was the star’s main role.



Above: The Ishtar Gate in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany. The wise men could have seen gates like this in the Parthian Empire’s province of Babylonia.

Below: A small portion of cuneiform text of the “Cyrus Cylinder” in the British Museum. Photograph by Mike Peel.



The Star Itself

Apparently, God influenced the ancient civilizations so that certain heavenly objects became associated with royalty. At the right moment, these stellar associations with royalty made possible an astronomical announcement about the Messiah.

Several planets, including include Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Mercury, and Saturn, can be seen with the naked eye. When observed from earth without any visual aides these planets have the appearance of stars. The Greeks called them “wandering stars” because of their observable movements. The Babylonians called them “wild sheep” for the same reason.

In the theory proposed here, the celestial object that eventually became the star over Bethlehem was referred to as MUL.BABBAR by the Babylonians.³³ (Babylonian cuneiform names with Sumerian roots are often written in all capitals.) The name, MUL.BABBAR means the “white star.” This star, which was in reality the planet Jupiter, had been associated with kingship for many centuries before the birth of the Messiah. It is significant that Jupiter was positioned in the lion constellation (Leo) in the years 3 BC and 2 BC. The same constellation also contains the star Regulus, which was

known among the Babylonians as LUGAL, meaning “king.” The Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah, which has been historically connected with the lion constellation. The associations with kingship and the tribe of Judah opened the door to multiple symbolic connections.

Among the Jews, Jupiter has been called Sedeq (Tzedek) which means “righteousness.” The Jews were awaiting a righteous king who would arise as the Messiah. The early Church referred to Jesus as the “Righteous One” (see Acts 22:12-15). While it is not possible to establish when Jupiter was first named Sedeq (Tzedek) among the Jews, the Babylonian Talmud refers to Jupiter as Sedeq in a quote from the Rabbi Rav in about AD 200-225.³⁴ It is probable that the planet had this name well before that date because Rabbi Rav’s comment would have been incoherent if the planet was not already well-known as Sedeq by about AD 200.

Note as well that LUGAL (Regulus) can be translated in Hebrew as Melech, meaning “king.” The Hebrew names Melech and Sedeq together could evoke ideas of “Melchizedek,” a righteous messianic figure mentioned in the Bible (See Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7).

צדק

Sedeq (Tzedek)
Meaning: “righteousness”
(the planet Jupiter)

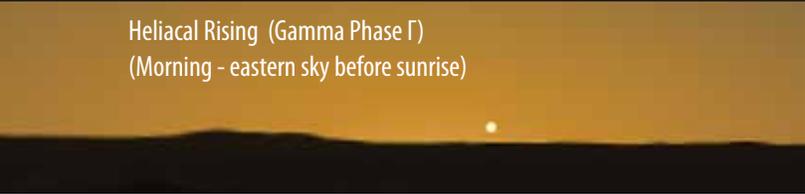
The Babylonian name for Jupiter, MUL.BABBAR, meaning the “White Star,” could be written in cuneiform as follows:



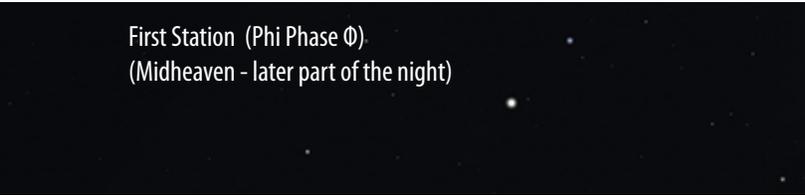
MUL.BABBAR (Sedeq / Jupiter)



Heliacal Rising (Gamma Phase Γ)
(Morning - eastern sky before sunrise)



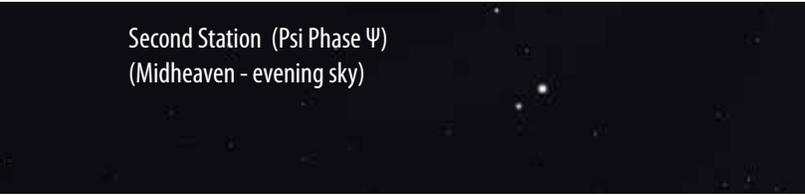
First Station (Phi Phase Φ)
(Midheaven - later part of the night)



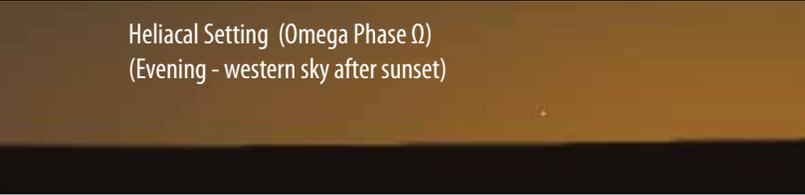
Acronychal Rising (Theta Phase Θ)
(Evening sky in the east after sunset)



Second Station (Psi Phase Ψ)
(Midheaven - evening sky)



Heliacal Setting (Omega Phase Ω)
(Evening - western sky after sunset)



Babylonian Planetary Theory was at the Heart of the Story

Without a basic understanding of Babylonian planetary theory, it is impossible to understand the Star of Bethlehem. The annual planetary cycle of Jupiter (MUL.BABBAR/Sedeq) is described below. The planet's phases were always predicted and recorded in Babylonian astronomical documents. The planet passes through various stages each year. It disappears into the solar glare, reappears and finally sets every 13 months. Modern astronomers use Greek letters to indicate various aspects of the planet's regular cycle.³⁵ The cycle is described in the following paragraphs.

1. **Heliacal Rising (Gamma Phase Γ):** The Akkadian name used in the cuneiform texts meant "appearance." This was the first visibility of Jupiter in the east in the morning sky as it emerged out of the solar glare.

2. **First Station (Phi Phase Φ):** The Akkadian name signified 'first' or literally 'front' station. During the first station the planet appears to stop its movement among the background stars for about two weeks. The mid-point of that period was specifically predicted in the Babylonian astronomical almanacs as the first stationary point. For Jupiter, the first station happens about four months after the heliacal rising.

3. **Acronychal Rising (Theta Phase Θ):** The Akkadian name meant "daylight rising." This phase was when Jupiter last rose in a visible manner in the east at sunset about two months after the first station. The acronychal rising happens somewhat after sunset and several days before true opposition.

4. **Second Station (Psi Phase Ψ):** The Akkadian name meant "second or literally 'rear' station." During the second station

the planet appears to stop its movements among the background stars for about two weeks. The mid-point of that period was specifically predicted in the Babylonian astronomical almanacs as the second stationary point. This phase happens about two months after the acronychal rising.

5. Heliacal Setting (Omega Phase Ω): The Akkadian name signified “setting.” This event was the last yearly visibility of the planet in the evening sky after sunset. This happens about four months after the second station.

The planet then passed into the solar glare. About 30 or more days later, the planet would have risen, and the cycle again repeated itself. Jupiter’s entire synodic cycle takes about 399 days. The planet goes through the twelve signs of the zodiac in about 12 years.

A 50-year-old Babylonian astronomer, who had worked for 30 years, would have perhaps witnessed about 60 stationary points of the planet MUL.BABBAR (Sedeq / Jupiter). He could have seen or calculated about 30 heliacal risings, 30 heliacal settings, as well as 30 acronychal risings of the planet.

In some cases, the planetary phases of Jupiter were considered to be ominous or symbolically significant. The synodic cycle of Jupiter was at the heart of the story in 3 and 2 BC.

Γ

MUL.BABBAR’s (Jupiter’s) Gamma Phase

*Jupiter’s first visibility in the east before sunrise. (Mercury is up above.)
(Southern France, October 2016 - Author’s photo)*

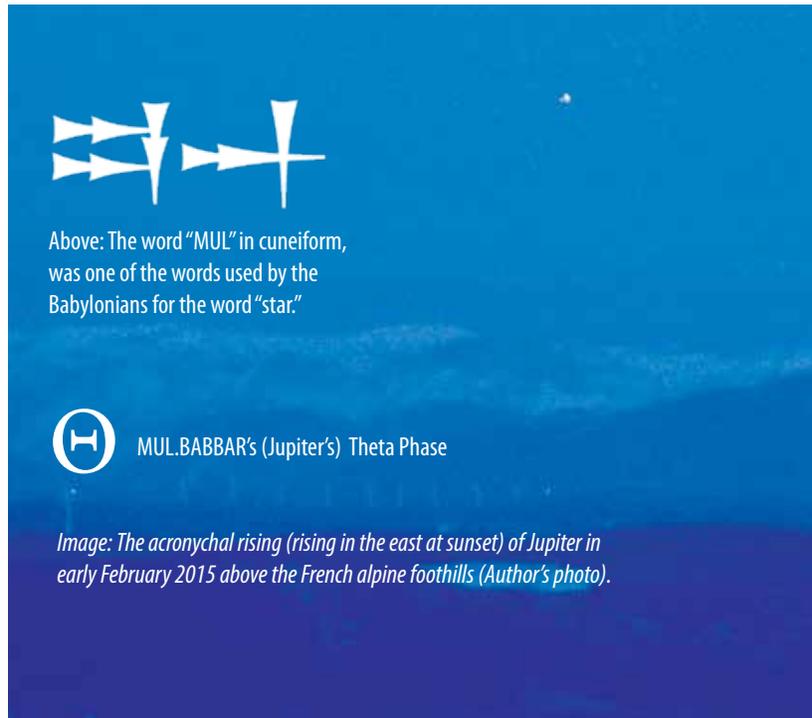


Above: The word “MUL” in cuneiform, was one of the words used by the Babylonians for the word “star.”

⊙

MUL.BABBAR’s (Jupiter’s) Theta Phase

Image: The acronychal rising (rising in the east at sunset) of Jupiter in early February 2015 above the French alpine foothills (Author’s photo).



MUL.BABBAR'S Unique Cycle

in 3 and 2 BC

The following pages describe celestial events, which could have caused the wise men to identify the star, and to associate it with the Jewish Messiah. There were other important secondary celestial signs not necessarily related to the “star” as such, which are not included in this booklet. All the events are described in much greater detail in the author’s books *The Lion Led the Way* and *A Sign Over Bethlehem*.

In the following list of events, the heliacal risings, heliacal settings, and acronychal risings were calculated with the Alcyone “Planetary, Lunar, and Stellar Visibility” software.³⁶ The planetary stations were established using several astronomy programs.

MUL.BABBAR's Gamma Phase Γ

Early Morning, July 29, 3 BC

When MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) first rose in the east after passing through the solar glare in 3 BC, the Sun was in conjunction with Regulus (LUGAL /Melech), the “king star” in the constellation Leo. Remember Psalm 89:35-37, “*His throne shall endure before me like the sun.*” The Babylonians were constantly aware of the position of the Sun in relation to the background stars.³⁷ According to the Alcyone software, Jupiter probably had never before been visible in its heliacal rising phase on the same day as the Sun’s annual conjunction with the Regulus. This event in July 3 BC was unique. It probably had not happened before in the history of Babylonian astronomy.³⁸

Eastern Sky Before Sunrise



MUL.BABBAR's Phi Phase Φ

Night, November 26, 3 BC

On the very day when MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) had reached its first stationary point in Leo, the Moon passed directly in front of Regulus (an occultation). The royal symbolism is evident. Remember the lunar witness of Psalm 89:35-37: *"The witness in the sky is faithful."* Often twenty-first-century observers cannot fully appreciate the significance of this event. Mesopotamian astronomers had been observing the heavens for well over 2,000 years by the time of Jesus' birth. Every year they produced an almanac which mentioned the various phases of Jupiter's cycle. However, according to one rough estimation, the coincidence of Jupiter's first stationary point (MUL.BABBAR, the king planet) being in Leo at the same moment as a lunar occultation of Regulus (LUGAL, the king star) could only happen about once in 2,750 years. No Babylonian wise man had ever observed such an event.



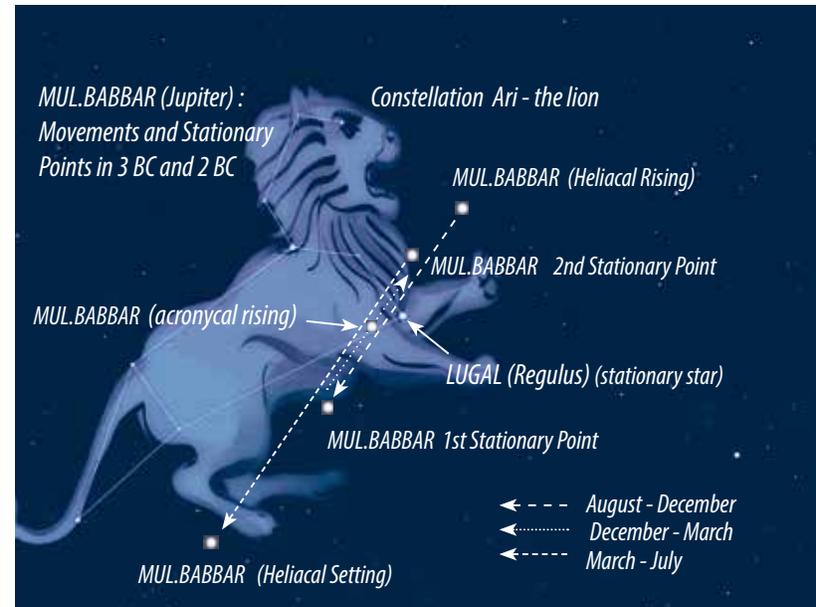
Toward 11 PM



Toward Midnight



Toward 1 AM



Planetary Movements and Stationary Points in 3 BC and 2 BC

Jupiter passed the star Regulus three times
in 3 BC and 2 BC (conjunctions) :

Sept. 14th, 3 BC

Feb. 17th, 2 BC with the moon

May 9th, 2 BC with the moon

Events in Jupiter's (MUL.BABBAR's /Sedeq's) cycle
in 3 BC and 2 BC :

07/29/3 BC (Heliacal Rising)

11/27/3 BC 1st Stationary Point

01/20/2 BC (Acronychal rising)

03/28/2 BC 2nd Stationary Point

07/28/2 BC (Heliacal Setting)

MUL.BABBAR's Theta Phase 0

Early Evening, January 20, 2 BC

On the probable date of MUL.BABBAR's (Jupiter's) acronychal rising the moon passed in front of Regulus again, making a second occultation. (An acronychal rising is a rising in the east at sunset.) The king planet was with the king star, while the lunar witness underlined the enduring nature of the Messiah's throne (Ps. 89:35-37).

This particular occultation and acronychal rising took place during the full moon of the month of the Jewish month of Shevat (Shebat). The name of the month is related to the Hebrew word for a scepter (shebet) found in the prophecy in Genesis 49:8-10. According to one rough estimation, the coincidence of Jupiter's acronychal rising being in Leo at the same moment as the lunar occultation of Regulus could only happen about once in 5,500 years. By the time of Jesus' birth, the Babylonians had specifically predicted the dates of the acronychal risings of MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) in their astronomical almanacs every year for hundreds of years.



After Sunset



Toward 7 PM



Toward 8 PM

Winter 2 BC

שבט

Shebet: rod, staff, branch

MUL.BABBAR's Psi Phase Ψ

Late Night, March 31, 2 BC

This incident in March was part of MUL.BABBAR's (Sedeq's/Jupiter's) yearly cycle, the planet's second stationary phase. In modern astronomical terminology it was the ψ (Psi) phenomenon of the cycle. Babylonian astronomers and others would have certainly predicted, observed, and recorded Sedeq's second stationary point in 2 BC.

During its first and second stationary phase, the planet MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) was usually visually stationary for about two weeks, and the Babylonians called the midpoint of that time the stationary point.

Technically Jupiter's second station was on March 29/30 in the spring of 2 BC. However, sometimes the astronomers wrote the words "stationary around or about" a certain date in their records. On March 31, MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) set in the west just moments before the moon rose in the east. Minutes later, LUGAL (Regulus) set as the moon rose. Somewhat

I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. "His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. "It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful."

Psalm 89:35-37

similar incidents involving simultaneous risings and settings of objects were occasionally mentioned in Babylonian astronomical records.

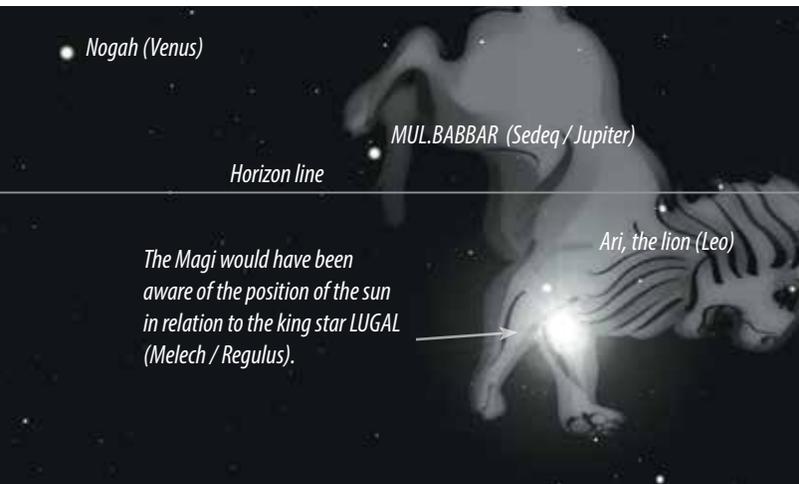
Could this have been symbolically royal for the Babylonian astronomers? (Think of Psalm 89:35-37.)



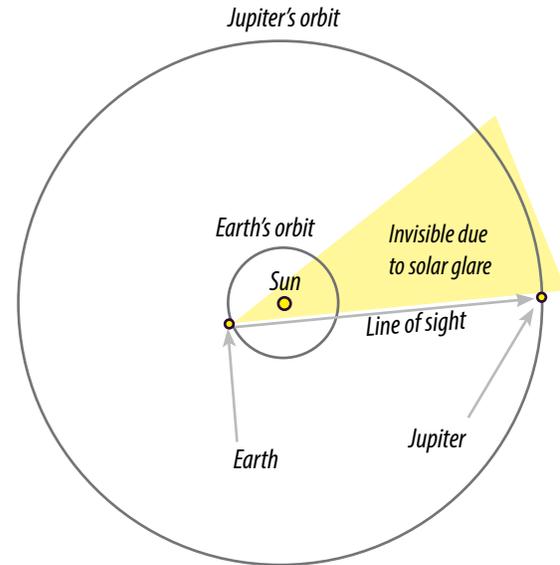
MUL.BABBAR's Omega Phase Ω

Early Evening July 28, 2 BC

When MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) finally made its heliacal setting in the west at the end of the planetary cycle, the sun was again in conjunction with Regulus in the constellation Leo. This again brings to mind the solar witness of Psalm 89:35-37. This event was the mirror image of the first visible rising of Jupiter in the summer of 3 BC, exactly one year previously.



This image shows what the Magi could have seen.



There is a region near the sun where the planets and stars become completely invisible in the solar glare. Month after month on specific dates planets and stars visibly enter and emerge from this zone dominated by the solar glare. These appearances and disappearances are called heliacal risings and settings.

Babylonian astronomers did not usually think in terms of planetary orbits, although today we know how to explain the phenomena in the heavens more thoroughly. It is also possible that Matthew's Magi believed that the earth orbits the sun. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, a Babylonian astronomer, Seleucus of Seleucia on the Tigris (second-century BC), further developed the idea of a sun-centered solar system, which had been proposed by the Greek astronomer Aristarchus. It is completely possible that Matthew's wise men believed the earth orbits around the sun.

Key Images of Royalty

Many of the Parthian kings had an image of the crescent moon and a star on their coins (See below). It is very probable that this represents LUGAL (Regulus /Melech), the king star in Leo, with the Moon.

Pieces of money like the ones on this page would have been common in the Parthian Empire under several kings. For possibly several decades before their arrival in Bethlehem, Matthew's Magi would have been using the coins of Emperor Phraates IV with this same image of the Moon and the star LUGAL (Sharru/Melech/Regulus). Phraataces, Phraates' son, was using a similar image when the wise men made their journey to Judaea.

The image on the coins is identical to the illustration on the "Lion Horoscope" found at Mount Nemrut in modern Turkey where the image is obviously the moon with Regulus (see right). It is evident that the Magi could have readily associated royalty with Regulus and the Moon. In the right circumstances, it would not have been hard to transfer these types of associations to the Jewish Messiah.

The Parthian emperors had the image of the moon and the star Regulus (Melech/LUGAL) on their coins as a royal symbol.

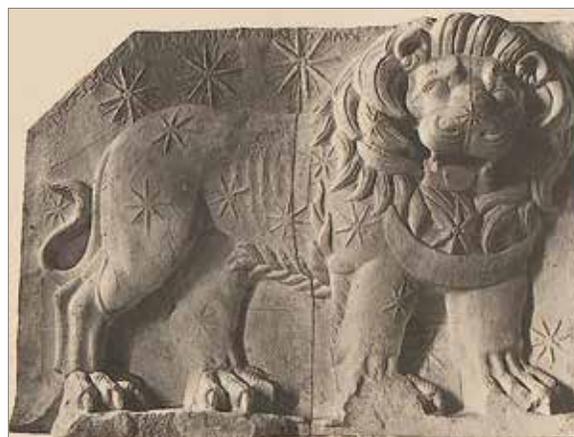
Below left: Phraates IV Parthian Emperor (38-2 BC).

Below right: Phraataces, successor of Phraates IV (2 BC - AD 4).

Images used by permission of www.cngcoins.com.



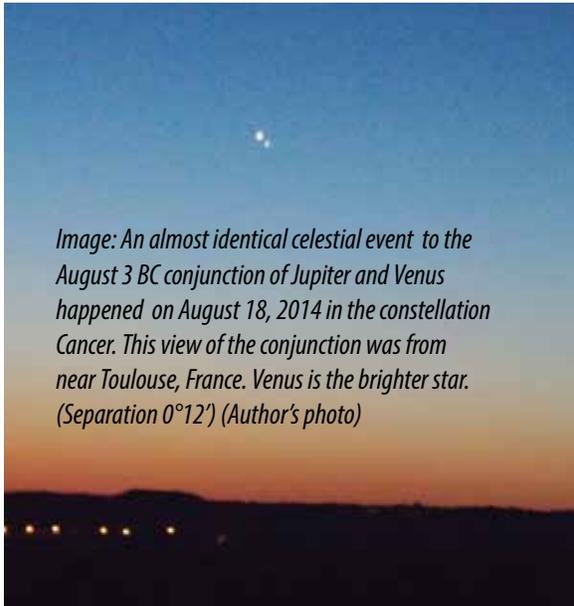
Above: The image shows part of the peak of Mount Nemrut in southern Turkey. Some ruins are visible on the left. The tomb of Antiochos I of Commagene is located in the large artificial pyramid made of stone fragments. The site contains the so-called "Lion Horoscope" found in the image below. Image: Wikipedia: Saipal (CC) 2 License.



Above: The so-called "Lion Horoscope" from the tomb of Antiochos I of Commagene (a royal family related to most of the major dynasties in the ancient East). The crescent moon and the star Regulus (LUGAL/Melech) can be seen just below the lion's head in the right hand side of the photo. "Lowenhoroshkop," a 1883 photo by Carl Humann.

Other Signs Involving MUL.BABBAR

The planet Jupiter (MUL.BABBAR) was involved in other signs that also had royal and messianic symbolism during the years 3 and 2 BC. These signs took place in the same time period as the signs involving Jupiter's phases, but they have been set apart here to allow us to highlight the signs connected to Jupiter's annual planetary phases. Some of these other celestial events have been central to various other theories concerning the Star of Bethlehem.



Sign of the The King Rising

August 12, 3 BC

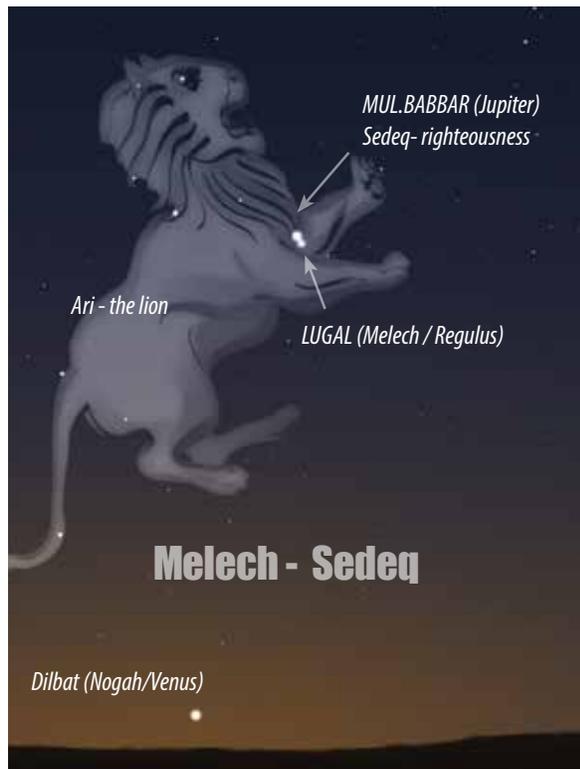
Two weeks after the heliacal rising of Jupiter, the king planet was in conjunction with Venus at the very beginning of the lion constellation. In Hebrew, Venus is called Nogah, meaning "brightness." The combination of Nogah and Jupiter (Hebrew: Sedeq / righteousness) together could be interpreted as "bright / righteousness" or eventually the "bright Righteous One." The "Righteous One" was a term used by the early Church to describe the Messiah (Acts 22:14). At the very same moment as the conjunction, only six degrees away, the king star Regulus (LUGAL) probably made its annual visible heliacal rising (annual first visibility in the east). The combination of the two events would have been exceedingly rare.



Melchizedek Sign 1

September 14, 3 BC

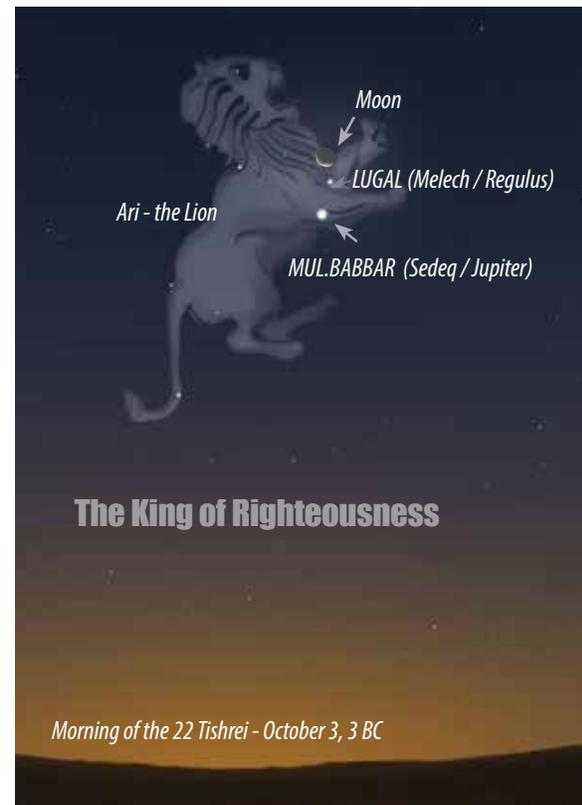
Jupiter and Regulus were in their first conjunction in the lion constellation. While such conjunctions are not rare, this one took place during an extended series of events, making it a link in a symbolic chain.³⁹ Melech is the Hebrew equivalent of the Babylonian name LUGAL (king), which was their name for Regulus. The names Melech and Sedeq conjure up ideas of “Melchizedek,” a messianic figure.⁴⁰ This same Hebrew symbolism could have applied to other interactions of Regulus and Jupiter in the following months.



“Great Day” Sign

October 3, 3 BC

On the Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jupiter, the Moon and Regulus were all closely grouped together in the lion constellation. Remember the lunar witness of Psalm 89:35-37 “*The witness in the sky is faithful.*” This event combined with a Jewish festival may have been significant in making a connection with the Jewish Messiah. It would have been exceedingly rare for Jupiter and the Moon to be positioned in this way on the Great Day.



Melchizedek Sign 2

February 17, 2 BC

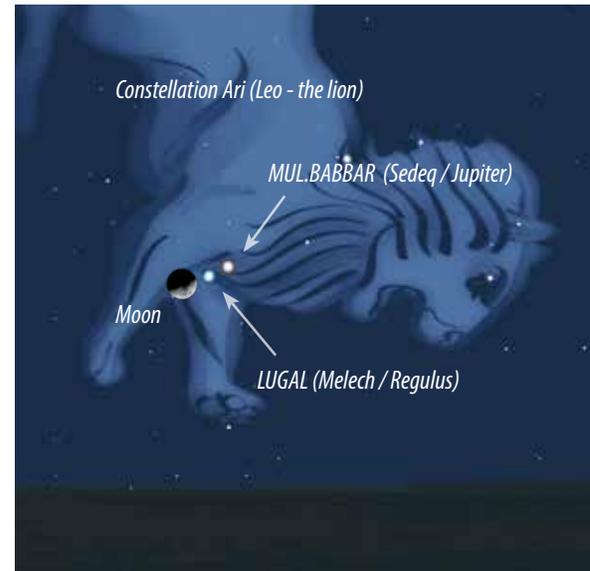
Following MULBABBAR's (Jupiter's) theta phase, the king planet moved further to the west coming close to LUGAL (Regulus). This caused Jupiter and Regulus to enter into a second conjunction, perhaps evoking Melchizedek (Melech / Sedeq). However, on this very day, the Moon was positioned alongside the two "stars" bringing to mind the symbolism cited earlier: the king planet with the king star accompanied by the lunar witness (Psalm 89:35-37).



Melchizedek Sign 3

May 9, 2 BC

Three months after their second conjunction, Jupiter and Regulus were in a third conjunction. Again on this very day, the moon was positioned alongside the two "stars." The lunar witness in Ps. 89:35-37 again applies. This event also brings to mind the symbolism cited earlier. The Hebrew names Melech and Sedeq (the king planet with the king star) make up the name Melchizedek, who was seen as being a messianic figure. This event was almost an exact duplicate of the sign on February 17, 2 BC.



The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

A Single Star - June 17, 2 BC

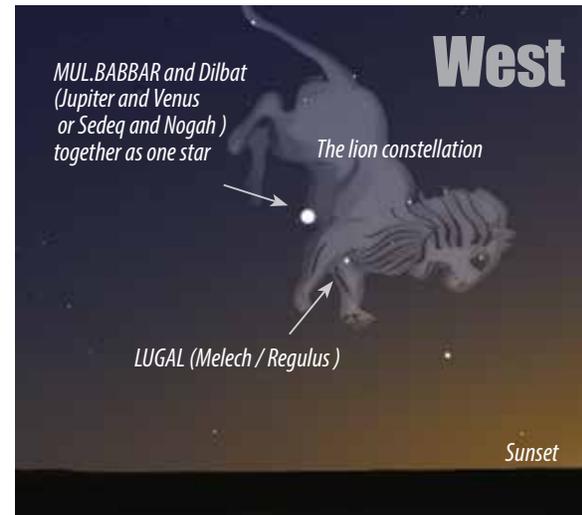
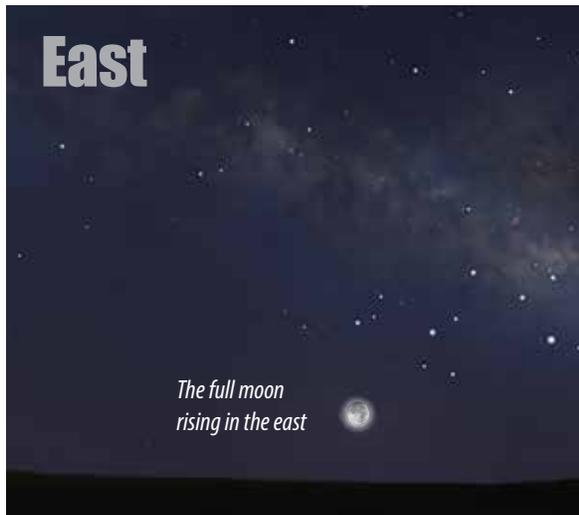
In June, the planets MUL.BABBAR and Dilbat (Jupiter and Venus) visually became a single star in the lion constellation very close to the king star, LUGAL (Regulus).⁴¹ During the event, it would have been impossible to distinguish one planet from the other with the naked eye. A good telescope would have been necessary to discern the two planets individually. The wise men did not have any optical aides that could magnify objects. During the 2,500 years prior to the Messiah's birth, there were only three other visible conjunctions of Jupiter and Venus of a somewhat similar closeness. The extremely rare previous conjunctions of this type were only visible for a few minutes because of the solar glare. However, the event in 2 BC lasted about two and a half hours from sunset until the single "star" set on the western horizon.

Amazingly the full moon rose in the east, while the two planets were visibly joined in the west, bringing to mind the lunar witness of Psalm 89:35-37:

"Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. "His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful."

The Jewish names for the two planets, Sedeq and Nogah (Jupiter and Venus), when taken together could symbolically underline "bright righteousness" or the "bright Righteous One." Jesus, the expected king of righteousness, found in Jeremiah 23 and 33, is the descendant of David, who was the bright star of Numbers 24:17.

Some other signs took place which are not discussed here for the sake of brevity and clarity. MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) rose again out of the solar glare in late August 2 BC and the cycle began again.



Appreciating the Signs in the East

About half of the celestial events listed above took place during of a phase of MUL.BABBAR's (Jupiter's) planetary cycle. It would be exceedingly rare for this type of coincidence to take place. No magus (wise man) would have missed the royal symbolism of the series of unique events connected to the planet's regular annual cycle. The sun and moon were involved in most of the royal signs, also making a strong connection with Psalm 89:35-37.

Normally, the Babylonian astronomers would have interpreted celestial events through their omen catalog called the *Enuma Anu Enlil*. However, even though their main omen compendium comprises 70 cuneiform tablets, it does not contain anything like the extended series of royal signs connected to MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) in 3 and 2 BC. Here is a small sample of the omens indicated in the catalog:

*If Venus and Jupiter come close, then there will be a reign of destruction (concerning) the king of Amurru.**

*If Venus enters Jupiter, then the king of Akkad** will die, the dynasty will change ...*

Notice that these two events are similar to the events indicated in this book on August 12, 3 BC and June 17, 2 BC. However, in both cases the king star LUGAL (Regulus) or the Moon added other aspects to the events, surpassing the omens. God's signs were more important than the omens.

Notes: *(A kingdom in the second millennium BC in Syria and Lebanon)

** (A kingdom in the second millennium BC in central Mesopotamia.)

The preceding examples were taken from the book *Babylonian Planetary Omens* by Reiner and Pingree (Groningen: Styx, 1998), page 45. They are typical of Babylonian ideas about celestial events.

The number and frequency of the royal celestial signs in 3 and 2 BC were unique. The entire series of royal celestial signs would have been impressive to any magus during the period, and it probably caused several men across the Middle East to ask questions about the meaning of the events.

The heavenly signs in 3 and 2 BC surpassed the usual manner that the Babylonians had employed for understanding the heavens. The events were unique enough to lead the astronomers away from their normal manner of thinking. However, they would have been convinced that something concerning a great king was implied through the signs. The men probably eventually made connections with Judaism through the Jewish names of stars and planets as well as the Jewish dates connected with some events. Finally, after some reflection, the men would have realized that the signs were announcing to the Jewish Messiah, who was to be the greatest of kings, destined to reign over all the nations.

The birth of the Messiah was probably inferred through the extended series of symbolically royal celestial events. Individually, none of the events would have necessarily carried enough symbolic weight to signal the Messiah's coming. However, taken together, the entire series of relatively discreet royal signs is remarkable.

Daniel tells us that the Messiah was destined to arrive at the end of a period involving seven “sevens” and 62 “sevens.” If the Magi understood this prophecy and others, it would have been natural for them to assume that the Messiah’s birth was being announced in the heavens through the royal signs.

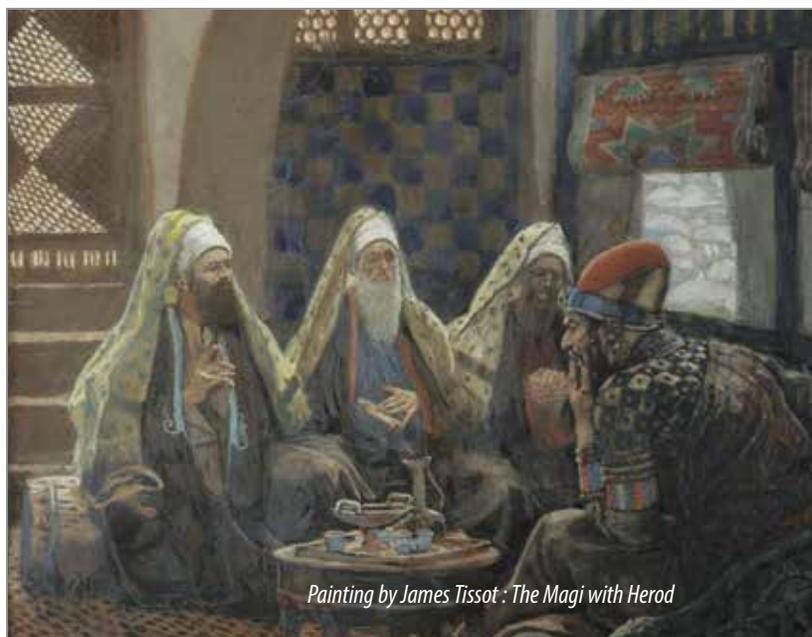
According to Genesis 41:32, when certain dreams are repeated, then one can think that the subject of the dream is determined by God, and it will surely come about quickly. If the men also understood this principle, they may have applied it to the celestial events, for example: The first and last visibilities of Jupiter, the signs involving the lunar occultation of Regulus, and the “Melchizedek signs” with the moon.

Following the signs in the east, the wise men traveled to Judaea. It is probable that they arrived in Jerusalem toward the middle of December in 2 BC. The men may have been in the city for a couple of weeks before their interview with Herod. After meeting the king, the Magi went to Bethlehem. As indicated earlier, on pages 8-9 in this book, the men would have traveled to the town in the daytime. For them the star was a sign concerning the Messiah, it was not a visual guide.

In all of Babylonian astronomical history there had never been such a clear series of heavenly events specifically related to kingship.



Above: The ancient city of Jerusalem near the royal palace.



Painting by James Tissot : The Magi with Herod

The Skies Above Bethlehem

End December 2 BC / Early January 1 BC



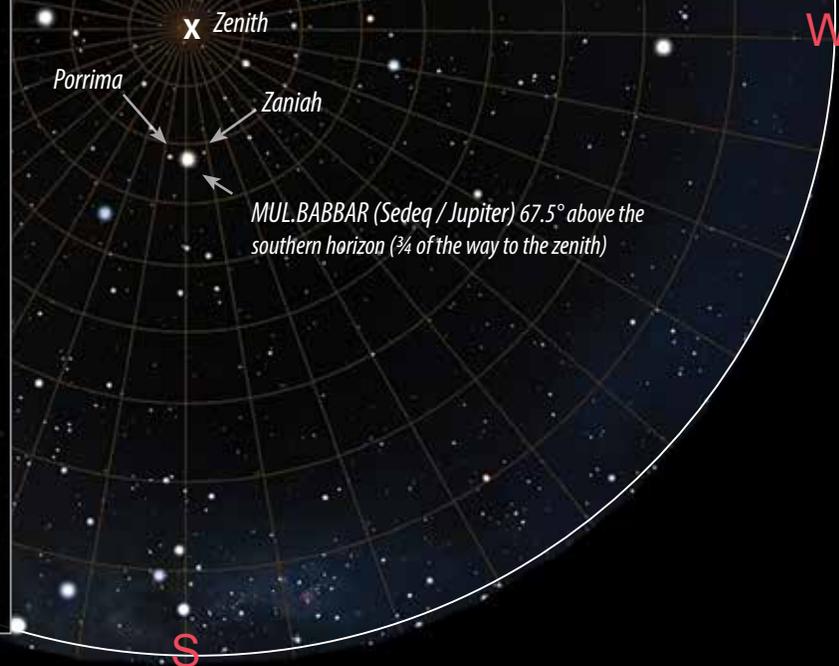
During the last part of December and into very early January in 2/1 BC, Jupiter's position was generally over the town of Bethlehem from about 2:00 AM until 6:00 AM. The Babylonians referred to these hours as the "last part of the night" in their astronomical diaries.

Matthew's language is descriptive and accurate. The star was not at 90° above the town, but it was well over it. Looking at a star at such an altitude can put a significant strain on one's neck. The star was certainly above the town.

This image shows the perspective of someone laying on the ground looking directly at the zenith. The perspective is distorted because one cannot see the zenith and the horizon at the same time.

In reality, the Magi would have mainly looked up to see the star when it was above the town because it was well above their heads. The image shows a view looking from Bethlehem toward 4:00 AM, when Jupiter reached its highest altitude. (67.5° above the horizon, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to the zenith). The star was over 55° above the horizon from about 2:00 AM to about 6:00 AM. Jupiter's high altitude would have forced any observer to lift his head significantly to look directly at it.

An Unexpected Sign



PART 7

The Star Over Bethlehem

MUL.BABBAR - Phi Phase Φ

End of December 2 BC

If the wise men arrived in Bethlehem about one year after Jesus' birth, the planet MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter) again would have been at its first stationary point toward the end of December (28/29). Each night, the star arrived high in the sky over Bethlehem after rising in the east and climbing to mid-heaven.⁴² For a large portion of the night the "star" dominated the Judaea sky, well above the heads of the Magi.

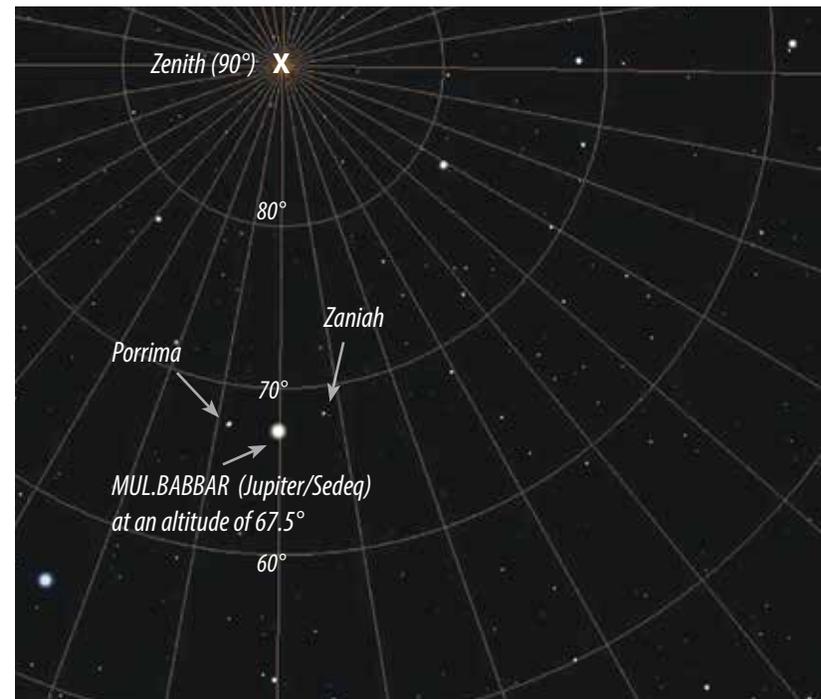
After all they had experienced in the East, the wise men probably would not have been expecting any other celestial signs. Most of the previous signs involving MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter/Sedeq) had been associated with LUGAL (Regulus/Melch) and the constellation of the lion (Leo). However, when the men were in Judaea, the "star," MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter/Sedeq), was in Virgo. The obvious links to kingship implied by the lion constellation and the king star Regulus were no longer present. It is very doubtful that the Magi were looking for another celestial sign. They would have known the exact calculated date of MUL.BABBAR's (Jupiter's) first stationary point at the end of December in 2 BC. However, they would not have been expecting to be in Bethlehem at that moment.

Because they did not follow the star as a visual guide, the men probably went to Bethlehem from Jerusalem during the daylight hours. Before their interview with Herod, the Magi would perhaps never have dreamed of finding themselves in a small Judaeian town looking for the Messiah. Psalm 132,



Above: The edge of Bethlehem generally looking toward the traditional site of the shepherd's field.

Below: In late December of 2 BC, the star over Bethlehem was very high up toward the zenith for a large portion of the night. The star was often literally over the heads of the wise men.



whose main subject is David the king, contains a passage about Jerusalem that could have led them to believe that the Messiah would have been found in the Jewish capital:

“There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed” (Psalm 132:17).

However, the king gave the men instructions to go to Bethlehem. After they arrived in the small town, during one of their nights there, apparently the men unexpectedly remembered that the star was at its station. But also the “star” was “standing over the place where the child was” throughout the last portion of the night. One repeatedly finds the phrase “the last part of the night” in the Babylonian astronomical diaries, indicating that they were actively observing the skies in the hours before dawn. During the stationary phase, the planet / star would have been stopped for two weeks among

For many hours each night the star was “standing high over the place where the child was.”
It dominated the whole heavens.

the background stars. No movement would have been observed. However, the Babylonians always indicated a date in the middle of the period as the “stationary point” in their predictive almanacs. If the wise men were in Bethlehem at that date, then the significance of the stationary phase as a celestial sign affirming the presence of the Messiah would have been obvious.⁴⁵

In light of their circumstances in Bethlehem, and the events the men had experienced during the year and a half previously, it would have been a logical assumption that the

stationary point signified another sign. Jupiter’s December 2 BC station would have been the seventh symbolic event in a row that would have coincided with Jupiter’s planetary cycle. Such a coincidence would not have gone unnoticed.

The star was waiting for the wise men when they arrived in David’s hometown. It had “preceded” them to the skies above Judaea. There, the star surprised the men by symbolically affirming the presence of the child in the town. The Magi then found the Messiah’s family by making a thorough search.

Warned through a dream not to return to Herod, the wise men apparently were able to return safely to the East. Joseph, after also being alerted by a dream, fled with Mary and their young son. They traveled to Egypt. Sometime later they established themselves in Nazareth.



Above: A portion of the chapelle dome at the traditional site of the shepherd’s field says “Glory to God in the Highest.”

Conclusions

The planet Jupiter was involved in an extended series of symbolically significant celestial events in 3 and 2 BC. These events and their royal significance would not have escaped Middle Eastern astronomers during the period. A small number of astronomers came to understand the star's messianic significance. Their story reveals that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. He is the appointed righteous king spoken of by the prophets and announced through the star.

In the context of all the celestial events in 3 and 2 BC, MUL.BABBAR's (Jupiter's) first station in late December 2 BC does qualify as a symbolically significant event, which may have caused the Magi to "rejoice exceedingly with great joy." Even though the last event in the series of signs is relatively unspectacular, it is a logical conclusion to the series of royal signs which was manifest in the last decade of the first millennium BC.

This explanation of the star offers a coherent theory of what caused the Magi to be interested in the star. It also gives an explanation of the star over Bethlehem that corresponds to known astronomical concepts during the period. The entire theory is centered on the role of the star as a celestial sign that announced the coming of the Messiah.

God interacts with people; he gives knowledge and understanding. He shaped the science of the ancient Mesopotamians so that one day He could reveal a stellar message about his Messiah. While the celestial signs did include some spectacular events, the signs were generally relatively discreet. Technically capable astronomers who could appreciate symbolic meanings were necessary to decipher the message of the star.

There are several advantages of adopting the "Star as a Sign" perspective as outlined in this booklet:

1) Such an interpretation of Matthew's account falls within the normal bounds of biblical interpretation while affirming the accuracy of the biblical account of the star. Matthew's star was not simply an invented story used to support an idea that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was really the awaited Messiah, and the heavens gave witness to that fact.

2) This manner of reading Matthew's account removes or bypasses several popular assumptions underlying the traditional miraculous view of the star, which are difficult or even impossible to explain.

3) The star's essential "reason for being" is affirmed: The star was a heavenly sign announcing the coming of the Messiah. The star carried a message; it never served as a visual guide "across moor and mountain, field and fountain" or to a particular house.

4) By using the "star as a sign" approach to the story, the Magi's technical wisdom and their understanding of symbolic meanings can find its full place. The Magi's knowledge somehow led the men to the conclusion that the star was associated with the Jewish Messiah. The exact relationship between the science of the wise men and the star is almost entirely neglected in the traditional approach to the story. It does not take very much wisdom to visually follow a blazing beacon. However, intelligence and wisdom are required to discern and interpret the symbolic meanings of celestial events.

In addition, it is possible that the skies bear witness to the truth of the Messiah's coming in other unexpected ways ...

Epilogue

The Heavens, Time, and Daniel 9

Earthbound time is related to the heavens in all its aspects including days, weeks, months, and years. In our day, the vast majority of human beings are not extremely attentive to the appearance of the new moon. Most men are not concerned with the rising of Sirius or Spica after their passage behind the sun each year. However, such events used to be very important in many civilizations.

Time and its measurement are profoundly connected to the heavens. Each passing year sees the sun climb high in the sky in summer, and afterward, it falls toward the horizon in winter. The seasons change based on a heavenly rhythm. The moon starts each new lunar month as a small crescent in the western sky. The first quarter moon, the full moon and the last quarter moon seem to serve as the basis for our cycle of weeks of seven days. Each morning the sun rises in strength, and in a way, it sets all the world in motion until evening when darkness falls. The seasons always have been indicated and shaped by the heavens. Time and life's rhythms are associated with the skies, whether in years, days, weeks, or months.

The festivals of Israel were connected to the heavens. The nation's crops were planted and the times of harvest arrived according to the seasons. Israel's three great pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were all connected to various aspects of the harvest. Passover and Pentecost were directly associated with the barley and wheat harvests.



The image above comes from the famous clock tower on St. Mark's Square in Venice. It illustrates the constellations, stars, sun and moon, as well as, time. The photo is not intended as an endorsement of either modern or ancient astrology.

It is not surprising that men who calculated the ancient calendars should have been among the first to realize that the coming of the Messiah was announced in the heavens because time is intimately tied to the heavens.

In the Bible, God has given us indications about the time when the "Righteous One" would arrive. Daniel's prophecy of the 70 "sevens" tells us that the Messiah would arrive at the culmination of seven "sevens" and 62 "sevens." The word, commonly translated as "weeks" in Daniel's text, could be more appropriately be rendered as "sevens." The implication is that the "sevens" have to do with time.

Usually, Daniel 9:24-27 has been taken to mean a period of years as was indicated earlier in this book (pages 17-18). However, as we will see in the coming pages, the "sevens" involve not only with years but also with days, weeks, and months. The prophecy has several symbolic and literal fulfillments. The next pages will explore some unexpected connections between Daniel 9 and the skies.

The Full Text of Daniel 9:24-27

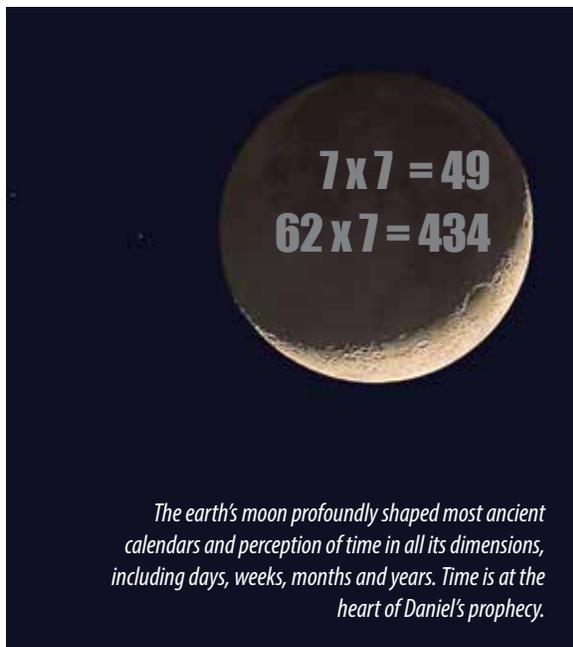
The mysterious numbers of Daniel 9:24-27 seem to be connected to incidents surrounding the star. One should explore the prophecy in greater depth. Below is the entire text of the prophecy.

“Seventy ‘sevens’ have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place (some translate the most Holy One - the Messiah).

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

Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

*And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”
(Daniel 9:24-27)*



“Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth ...”

The Star A Direct Symbolic Connection with Daniel 9

Daniel's 70 "weeks" (sevens) prophecy has both literal and symbolic elements, which all point to the coming of the Messiah and his reign of righteousness. The relationship of the prophecy with Sabbatical years was already explored (pages 17-18). However, Daniel's text can also be related directly to the Star of Bethlehem itself through a series of events which were culturally and astronomically connected to Jews, Babylonians, and the Parthian Empire.

Much of the population of the Parthian Empire believed that the association of the Moon with LUGAL (Regulus) was a positive indicator of good things for the royal house, as evidenced by a series of coins which were used by the Parthian Emperors (see page 31). The Babylonian Magi and the entire empire used such coins. As repeatedly demonstrated in the previous pages, the sun and moon are witnesses to the enduring nature of the Messiah's throne (Psalm 89:35-37).

The yearly Pentecost festival was also called the "Feast of Weeks" in Judaism because it happened seven weeks and one day following the annual First-fruits offering. Counting the days up until Pentecost is called "the Counting of the Omer."

In the spring of 3 BC, the Moon came very close to the star LUGAL (Regulus) seven weeks (49 days) after the annual First-fruits offering. The conjunction of the Moon with the king star LUGAL (Regulus/Melech) happened on May 19, 3 BC, making a clear royal sign involving Regulus and the Moon on a significant Jewish date. However, the conjunction

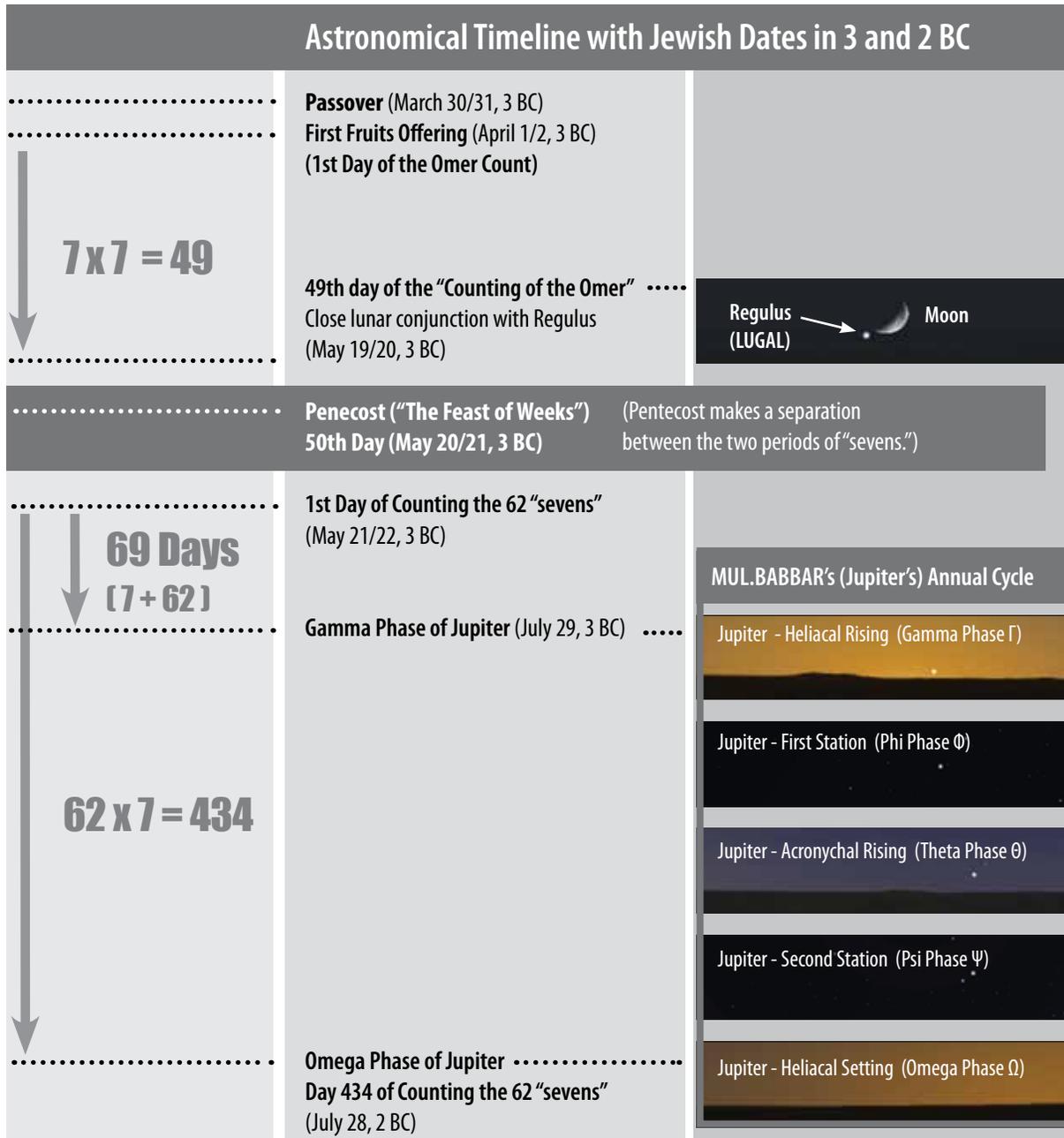


also can be connected to Jupiter's yearly cycle through the numbers $7 \times 7 = 49$, $62 \times 7 = 434$, and $7 + 62 = 69$. See the facing diagram which describes the numbers in relation to Pentecost and the planet's cycle in 3 and 2 BC.

The numbers symbolically evoke Daniel's prophecy and firmly establish the star/planet MUL.BABBAR (Jupiter/Sedeq) as the Messiah's star. This aspect of the proposed star theory shows the importance of the celestial events that took place while the wise men were in the East.

God planned these celestial events in a way which would not have gone unnoticed by the Babylonian astronomers. Even if most people would never have understood what was happening, the kingship symbolism was evident to the Magi.

However, there is even more. The heavens are connected with Jesus' life in other ways ... see the next pages.



Daniel 9

The Life, Death, and Resurrection of the Messiah

Despite all the fulfillments of prophecy that the Magi had witnessed, they must have had some questions. Daniel's prophecy itself would have been a major source of continuing questions. The wise men could have wondered about the meaning of the phrases, "Seventy sevens have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." What was the real sense of those words? How would these things happen? When would these events take place? But other mysterious lines continue:

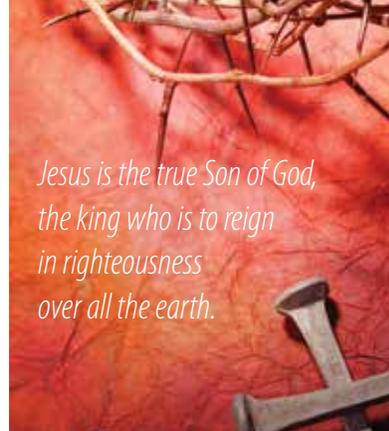
"After the 62 'sevens' the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined." (Daniel 9:26)

The restoration and rebuilding of the city had been prophesied, and it had been accomplished. The result was visible to all. But there remained this amazing text: The Messiah will be "cut off and have nothing." How could this be? How could the Messiah be "cut off and have nothing?" Why would this happen? What would be the goal? And beyond that, the rebuilt city and sanctuary would be destroyed again? Why would this be necessary? Later, Jesus himself echoed the prophecy concerning the destruction of the city and the temple, just days before his own death and resurrection.

Were the wise men pondering these texts as they walked in the city streets and temple courts in Jerusalem? We do not know, but it would seem possible. Apparently, Daniel's prophecy was part of the Magi's experience in determining the date of the Messiah's appearing. It is more than likely that the entire prophecy demanded their attention. Arriving in Jerusalem and seeing the magnificence of Herod's temple may have filled them with a sense of wonder, but they may have also had a sense of foreboding. All would not go well in Jerusalem, even if the Messiah had arrived. The wise men would have known that the Messiah would be "cut off" and the city and the sanctuary would be destroyed.

"Then after the sixty-two 'sevens' the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing ... "

The Magi who visited Jerusalem may not have understood anything of the idea the "cutting off of the Messiah." but whether or not the men understood, the series of Sabbatical years involving Daniel 9 ended in 2/1 BC following the Messiah's conception and birth. The star that signaled the coming of the Messiah was connected with royal celestial signs involving seven and 62 literal and symbolic weeks. But the prophecy was even more complete. One needs to remember that the lunar month was the basis for the Babylonian and Jewish calendars. Could there be further connections with the lunar calendar?



*Jesus is the true Son of God,
the king who is to reign
in righteousness
over all the earth.*

Early Church tradition placed Jesus' conception at Passover. One cannot find a more genuinely Jewish date than Passover. What if Jesus was conceived near the time of Passover? Additionally, what if one counts the lunar months of Jesus' life from his conception until his death and resurrection?

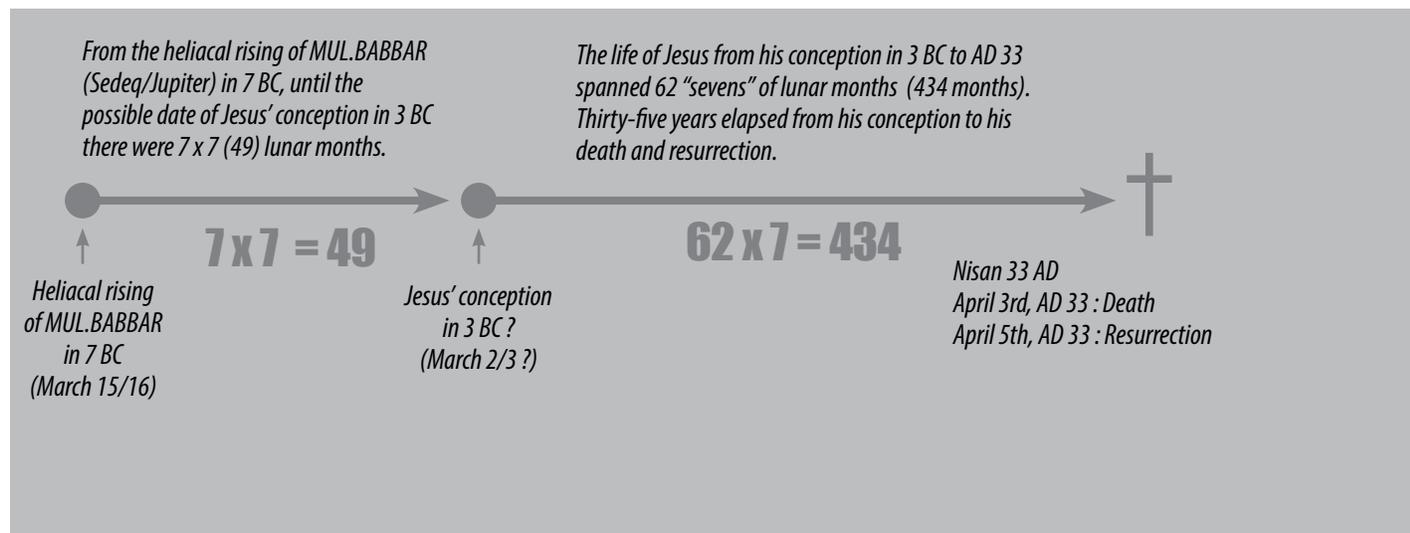
Is it possible that Jesus was literally "cut off" after 62×7 (434) lunar months? There seem to have been 434 lunar months from the time of Jesus' conception to the probable month of his death and resurrection in April of AD 33. Jesus apparently died and was raised from the dead about 35 years after his conception. At his death and resurrection, he would have been 34 years and about three months old.

One can say with confidence that MUL.BABBAR (Sedeq/Jupiter) was the Messiah's star. But in addition, many peo-

ple have thought that the conjunctions of MUL.BABBAR and JENNA (Shabbatei/Saturn) in 7 BC could have indicated something concerning the Messiah's coming. Perhaps this is also true. Saturn's Jewish name, Shabbatei, is connected to the Sabbath. Daniel's prophecy is undoubtedly connected with sevens and probably with Sabbatical years.

It may not be a coincidence that there were also 7×7 (49) lunar months from the heliacal rising of MUL.BABBAR (Sedeq/Jupiter) in 7 BC until a possible date for the conception of Jesus in the spring of 3 BC. Afterward, Jesus was "cut off" after 434 lunar months (62 "sevens").

Jesus' coming was announced in the skies. Apparently, the length of his life was indicated by Daniel's prophecy. But even more importantly, now he has been raised to endless life.



The King Who Suffered

The child that was born in Bethlehem became a man. He became a prophet and a savior. The announcement made by the star was real. Jesus has become the Messiah, the highest of the kings of the earth. However, Jesus overcame evil through offering himself as a sacrifice to the Father. His blood, which was shed in the spring of AD 33, has the power to liberate us all from our guilt, shame, and bondage.

God's own righteousness and faithfulness are on display through the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is the Savior of the world. The domination of sin, death, the world system and invisible, evil spiritual powers has been overcome through Jesus' death and resurrection. He has conquered our enemy, death, forever. Forgiveness and reconciliation have been made possible through the sacrifice of the Messiah. We are now invited to love him because he has first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Jesus does not allow people to feel indifferent. He has created controversy, and he still does. Jesus was conceived, born, lived, died and was raised from the dead. He is still alive. God will faithfully establish his rule in the new heavens and new earth. The Bible tells us:

"God has overlooked the times of ignorance, and that He is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should change their way of living, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).



While in appearance the Messiah was, according to Daniel's prophecy in Chapter 9:26, "cut off and had nothing," in reality he has become the chief authority in the whole universe, even if many refuse his kingship:

"The Son of God was born of a descendant of David according to his earthly lineage, he was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead..." (Romans 1:3-4).

Jesus himself said: *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).*

How do we respond to this man that God appointed over all of creation? Will we participate in his reign? Will we receive his very person into our lives? Jesus became King in an unexpected way—through suffering. He defeated sin, death and evil spiritual powers through his cross and resurrection. Most believing Jews were surprised and even shocked by the Messiah's death and resurrection. Many still resist his au-

King of Righteousness

King of kings and Lord of lords

thority. However, vast numbers of people have met the risen Savior. Many have tasted the fullness of life, which is in Jesus, the Messiah.

God promised Abraham a large number of descendants (physical and spiritual) who would know and obey the Lord:

The Lord took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:5-6).

In Galatians 3:9 we read,

"All who put their faith in the Messiah share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith."

God is surprising. May many more people discover and obey his appointed King. May we all inherit the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells, promised as an inheritance to those who love the Lord.



"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Daniel speaks of a time that is coming:

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2-3).

Will we obey the king
whose coming was announced in the stars?
The Kingdom of God is only for those who humble
themselves before the Righteous One.

Appendix 1

More Chronological Details

Jesus was born sometime before the death of Herod the Great. It is widely affirmed in scholarly circles that Herod died in 4 BC. This dating of Herod's death was first proposed by a Polish monk named Laurentius Suslyga in AD 1605. Some of Suslyga's ideas have recently been called into question.¹ Suslyga developed his dates based on a set of assumptions. However, if one makes different assumptions, then the dating scheme of Herod's death and Jesus' birth takes on another aspect. Below are five examples of alternative manners of thinking concerning the chronology.

1). Laurentius Suslyga's main original argument for dating Herod's death in 4 BC was centered on the renaming of the town of Bethsaida as Julius.² This renaming supposed took place to honor Julia, Augustus' biological daughter. Suslyga thought that the renaming had been done by Herod's heir, Philip the Tetrarch, before Julia was exiled in disgrace in 2 BC. Suslyga speculated that the renaming indicated that Philip already had become Tetrarch in 3 or 2 BC.

However, Suslyga's ideas about the renaming of Bethsaida have been called into question by archaeologists in recent decades. It now seems probable that the town was renamed in honor of Augustus' wife, Livia. Through his testament, the Emperor Augustus adopted his wife into the Julian family as his daughter in AD 14 and renamed her Julia. Shortly after Julia/Livia died in AD 29, Philip the Tetrarch apparently renamed Bethsaida in honor of the deceased empress, who had been appreciated as a great example of Roman womanhood. Julia/Livia was also the mother of the then reigning Emperor Tiberius. Josephus consistently used the name Julia for the empress, even when referring to her in the years preceding her name change. Pliny the Elder (circa AD 75) and Ptolemy (circa AD 150) continued to refer to Bethsaida as Julius, also indicating that the town was probably renamed in honor of Empress Livia.

While the name Julius was commonly used by Romans, Greeks and some Jews, the gospel writers continued to use the name Bethsaida for the town. The dead empress was elevated to the rank of a goddess under Emperor Claudius in AD 42. It is probable that the gospel writers would have refused to use the name Julius for Bethsaida since to do so would have been a tacit endorsement of idolatry.

2). Herod died during the Syrian governorship of Publius Quinctilius Varus. The coins used in dating Varus' governorship from 7/6 to 4 BC may, in reality, pertain to a little-known Varro (Varo), who was the Syrian governor from about 26/25 to 23/22 BC. In the 1830s, an Oxford scholar, Edward Greswell, was convinced that the coins should have been dated by the Caesarean Era, not the Actian Era.³ As Greswell pointed out, the coins place Varus' governorship much too early to match Josephus' account of the end of Herod's life. However, the same coins match the period of Varro's governorship perfectly when one uses Caesarian Era dating. Taking this into consideration, one could possibly date Varus' governorship from the summer of 2 BC to 1 AD. Other details concerning the coins are discussed in the author's book, *The Lion Led the Way*.



Diameter about 20 mm

Above: One of the so-called "Varus coins." Zeus dominates the obverse face while the goddess Tyche and the river god Orontes are on the reverse face of the coin. This British Museum coin is from the year 25. The Actian Era phrase "In the Year of the Victory" is not on the so-called "Varus coins." The Tyche / Orontes motif was found on the Antiochian coins several decades before the governorships of both Varro and Varus. Photo: Cecil Torr, *On Portraits of Christ in the British Museum, C.J. Clay and Sons* (1898).

3). Building on the ideas of W. E. Filmer, good arguments can be made that Herod's heirs backdated their reigns to 4 BC.⁴ This may have been the date of the unjust execution of Herod's Hasmonean heirs, Alexander and Aristobulus. Their deaths were caused by the false accusations of their half-brother Antipater, the crown prince. A few years later, because of his plot to assassinate the king, Antipater was also executed just five days before Herod's death. For Herod's remaining heirs (Archelaus, Philip, and Antipas), it could have been politically expedient to repudiate the traitorous and hated Antipater, who had reigned briefly with their father.⁵ By backdating their reigns to the deaths of the Hasmonean heirs, the remaining princes could have vindicated their Hasmonean half-brothers over Antipater.

The executed Hasmonean brothers remained exceedingly popular even after their deaths. An impostor, claiming to be Alexander, who had somehow supposedly escaped death, was widely acclaimed as Herod's true heir after the king's death.⁶ Only Augustus' personal intervention stopped the masquerade.

4). Surprisingly few scholars have explored the beginning of Herod's reign in precise detail.⁷ However, if Herod began his reign in 39 BC instead of 40 BC, it is impossible to place his 37-year reign in the period from 39 BC to 4 BC. References in Plutarch's *Life of Antony* combined with the narrative accounts of Appian, Cassius Dio and Josephus make it clear that Herod the Great was named king of Judaea in the late summer/fall of 39 BC after the Treaty of Misenum, not in very late 40 BC as is often assumed.⁸ Josephus certainly was in error about his first olympiadic date for the king's reign, apparently he also made an error concerning his Roman consular dates for Herod's reign.⁹

Josephus' narrative account of the beginning of Herod's reign fits the year 39 BC better than 40 BC. After being named king in Rome, Herod arrived back in Judaea after the Roman General Ventidius had already brought his Roman force almost to the gates of Jerusalem. When Herod arrived in Judaea, Ventidius had already departed again

leaving his subordinate Silo in charge. Ventidius made his invasion of Syria, Lebanon, and Judaea in the spring/summer of 39 BC, following the transfer of his large army from Italy in late 40 / early 39 BC. Mark Antony first heard about Ventidius' successful reconquest of Syria in the fall of 39 BC, when he and his wife Octavia arrived in Athens for the winter (Plutarch, *Antony* 33). If Herod was named king of Judaea in late 40 BC, why did he not accompany Ventidius' invasion force in the summer of 39 BC? Herod was apparently only named king of Judaea in the late summer of 39 BC.

5). The stormy weather that Herod encountered on his way from Egypt to Rome after the fall of Jerusalem and before he was named king of Judaea by the Romans was the annual "Etesian Winds," not winter storms in late 40 BC as it is often imagined (*Antiquities of the Jews* 14.14.2-3). Herod's rival Antigonus gained control in Judaea just after Pentecost, toward the end of June of 39 BC according to the timeline presented here. The fair weather Etesian winds ("yearly winds"), in the summer months of July and August 39 BC, could have made very heavy seas. These winds, originating in the Black Sea/Aegean Sea region, can blow at 40-50 knots (46-57 mph / 74-93 km per hour) for a period of several days to up to two weeks (even all the way to the Israeli and Egyptian coasts). The fair weather Etesian gales have been known to even prevent modern ships from leaving port. (See also Aratus, *Phaenomena*, section 147.)

6). The problems surrounding the dates of Quirinius' governorship of Syria and the census in Luke 2:1-5 can be resolved by an alternate translation of Luke 2:2, which reads: "This census took place before the time when Quirinius was governor of Syria."¹⁰ Quirinius' census in AD 6/7 was mentioned because it was well-known and had been particularly painful for the Jews. The Zealot movement against Rome owed its origin to Quirinius' census. The alternate translation of Luke 2:2 sets the census at Jesus' birth apart from the one under Quirinius.

These subjects are developed in detail in the author's book, *The Lion Led the Way*. (See the notes on the next page.)

Notes:

1 A key aspect of Suslyga's original dating scheme for Herod's death was centered on the renaming of the town of Bethsaida as Julias. See Frederick M. Strickert, *Philip's City: From Bethsaida to Julias*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), pp. 163-188.

2 Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.2.1 and *War* 2.9.1. Bethsaida was situated on the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River runs into the lake. It was the home of some of Jesus' disciples.

3 Edward Greswell, *Dissertations Upon The Principles And Arrangement Of An Harmony Of The Gospels*. Second Edition, In Four Volumes. Vol. I. (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1837), pp. 466-529. Greswell believed that Herod died in 4 BC, but he did not think that the so-called "Varus coins" should have been associated with Varus, but rather with Varro (Varo).

- Dwight Hutchison, *The Lion Led the Way*, (Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux: Éditions Signes Célestes, 2015), pp. 80-82 and Appendix 20, pages 320-332. Elsewhere the author also deals with Herod's heirs' coins.

4 Filmer, W. E.: "Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great," *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 17 (1966), pp. 283-298). See also *The Lion Led the Way*, pp. 82-85.

5 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.2.32 and 17.5.96.

6 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.12.324-338.

7 Even Emil Schürer simply slides over the topic. See Israel Shatzman, *The Armies of the Hasmonaeans and Herod: From Hellenistic to Roman Frameworks*, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), p. 151 and note 85.

8 *The Lion Led the Way*, pp. 78-88 and 266-275.

9 Emil Schürer, Géza Vermès, and Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), p. 281, note 3.

10 Translation of Luke 2:2 : N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: a Contemporary Translation of the New Testament (Kindle Version)*. HarperOne, 2011.

- N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 88-89.

- Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2," *JETS* 27/1 (March 1984) 43-52.

- Emil Schürer, Géza Vermès, and Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), p. 421.

Appendix 2 A Timeline of Herod's Reign and the Visit of the Wise Men:

c. 71 BC : Herod the Great was born.

47 BC : Herod's father, Antipater, appointed his son as the governor of Galilee (25 years of age).

41 BC: Herod and his brother Phasael named tetrarchs.

39 BC : Herod was named king of Judaea by the Romans.

36 BC : Herod became the "de facto" king of Judaea after the conquest of Jerusalem (Sabbatical Year - Wacholder).

32/31 BC : Herod's Arabian war (in his seventh year).

21/18 BC : Herod rebuilt the temple.

4 BC : Execution of Herod's sons Alexander and Aristobulus because of rumors that they were trying to overthrow their father and seize the throne. Before or after the deaths of Alexander and Aristobulus, Herod allowed his son Antipater, to hold significant power over the kingdom. Saturninus is the Governor of Syria at this point until the arrival of Varus.

3/2 BC : The Magi witnessed a series of heavenly events which led them to believe that the Messiah had been born.

2 BC : Varus becomes the governor of Syria. He remained as governor through the uprising which took place following Herod's death and Archelaus' accession to the throne.

2/1 BC : In December / January, the wise men were in Judaea.

1 BC : January 9/10 - During this night there was an eclipse of the moon written about by Flavius Josephus.

1 BC : In late January Herod died.

Appendix 3

The Story of the Lamp Repairman and the Great Sale

This story illustrates the interactions of the Magi's star and the wise men. Hopefully readers will find it amusing and instructive.

Starry Bob and His Three Friends:

In a certain very large city, there were three friends, Balty, Mel and Casimir. They lived on the far eastern side of the city. One day they went for a walk and saw another friend named Starry Bob, who was a lamp repairman, high above the ground on a ladder repairing a street lamp. Although Bob was far up in the air on his ladder above the ground, there was a lively conversation for several minutes. Toward the end, Starry Bob yelled down to his three friends, "There is a great sale taking place in the massive supermarket named Beth's Superstore on the other side of town." He continued saying, "It is not to be missed, I encourage you to go and find all the good deals."

The three friends continued on their way. Having taken their friend's advice to heart, they walked speedily toward the west, toward the massive store. At one traffic light a car stopped, and the mayor stepped out. The three friends were a bit embarrassed, but the mayor greeted them kindly and asked them where they were going in such a hurry. They all responded to the mayor together, "We have heard from a friend of the great sale at Beth's Superstore. We are hurrying to get there." The mayor responded, "I too have heard of this great sale. "Could you be so kind as to send me a SMS if you see something really interesting?" The mayor gave them his personal phone number and the men went on their way.

At the massive store, there was a huge crowd in several lines. The men started asking others in the waiting line where the best deals were located. And behold, unknown to Balty, Casimir and Mel the lamp repairman Starry Bob had another job repairing and installing lamps at Beth's Superstore. Starry Bob had taken his truck and gone on before his three friends to install an important new lamp just inside the main entrance of the store. He had preceded them there by at least a half hour.

Finally getting through the main entrance Balty, Casimir and Mel saw a high folding ladder standing almost over the entrance. Looking up, the three men saw Starry Bob, who just happened to be looking down as they entered the store. Starry Bob yelled down, "I told you it is a great sale, see the crowd!" At that moment Starry Bob connected the new light. Then everyone could see clearly to find the best deals. Mel, Balty and Casimir, being a bit superstitious, took it as a sign that they had made the right choice in coming to the store.

Commentary:

The Magi's star gave messages and preceded the wise men to Bethlehem in a similar manner to what is described above. The star functioned as a messenger and sign. It did not guide or lead anyone to Bethlehem. The star preceded the Magi from the east to Bethlehem chronologically, getting there in advance of the men on the ground. However, it was not visually leading them to the town or the very spot where the Messiah was located. The star was not even visually in front of them during their travels. Upon the men's arrival in Bethlehem, above the small Judaeen town the star manifested itself again as a sign concerning the Messiah. The star never led anyone anywhere. The star was a signal, a sign concerning the Messiah, not a directional indicator or guide.

Appendix 4

Important Points about the So-Called September 23, 2017 “Heavenly Sign” and Various Nativity Theories

1. In recent decades, some, probably well-meaning Christians have tried to associate the constellation Virgo with the woman mentioned in Revelation 12 in order to date the birth of Jesus as well as various end-times scenarios. However, the association of Revelation 12 with the constellation Virgo is assumed; it not proven.

2. The most natural interpretation of the sun, moon, and stars in Revelation 12 is related to Joseph’s symbolic dreams in Genesis 37. Jews in the first-century AD would have understood this connection. Joseph’s dreams give the interpretation of John’s vision. Revelation 12 is a symbolic vision; it does not associate the real sun, moon, and stars with any particular date(s).

3. The woman in the Revelation 12 was “clothed with the sun” because Jacob is the one who gave her existence (Genesis 37:10). The twelve stars are the twelve Jewish tribes, and the moon must be symbolic of the mothers of the twelve tribes (Genesis 37:5-11). The Jews often spoke of their people figuratively as a woman, as a virgin (Amos 5:2 and Jeremiah 31:4). The woman in Revelation 12 symbolizes believing Israel. The sun, moon, and stars establish her identity.

4. If one thinks that the woman in Revelation 12 is a constellation because of the phrase “a great sign appeared in heaven” (σημεῖον μέγα ὠφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ...), then one also needs to believe that the dragon in Rev. 12:3 and following is a constellation because of the phrase “Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon ...” (ὠφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ...)

5. Both the dragon and the woman in Revelation 12 are very active. However, constellations are stationary. A motionless, unchanging constellation could not do the things indicated in the text.

6. Revelation 15:1 uses the same phrase concerning a sign in heaven: “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.” (Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν ...). No known constellation has seven angels with seven bowls of wrath. If the heavenly signs of Revelation 12 are constellations, then one would expect that the “great and marvelous sign in heaven” in Revelation 15 would also be a constellation. One of the angels in Revelation 15 later speaks directly to John in Revelation 17:1-18 and 21:9. However, constellations do not speak to human beings.

7. Despite the fact that Leo has been associated with royalty in several cultures, Leo is not a crown; it is a lion. The constellation Leo has never been thought of as a crown for Virgo until the recent end-times speculations. However, one cannot simply redefine an established constellation at will to fit end-times scenarios.

8. The constellation Leo has up to 27 visible stars according to Ptolemy, the most ancient authority on the subject. There are 10 relatively bright stars of magnitudes 1, 2, and 3 in Leo. The other stars are dimmer, but still visible. However, only nine stars in Leo are mentioned by the “September 23, 2017” theorists. They associate nine stars with three visible planets to make 12 stars (Rev 12:1). (See a good article about these facts at: <https://answersingenesis.org/astronomy/stars/are-stars-lining-september-23-lords-return>).

9. Some Bible teachers are claiming that the male child in Revelation 12:5-6 and his being “caught up to heaven” could be equated with the Church and the so-called “rapture.” One major problem with this understanding is that the child of Revelation 12 is male, but in the Bible, the Church always is spoken of in the feminine form (Ephesians 5:22–33; Revelation 19:7–9, 21:2, 9, 22:17). Historically it has usually been thought that the male child in Revelation 12:5-6 is Jesus, not the Church. He will rule the nations with an iron scepter (Ps. 2:9 and Rev. 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15).

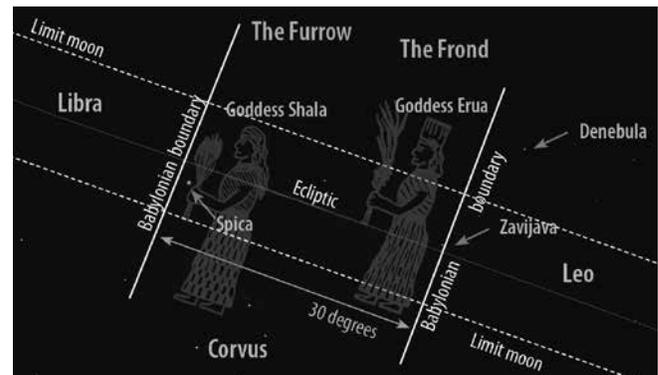
10. The book of Revelation is not always in chronological order. The events in Revelation 12 are not after the events in Revelation 4-11 (seven seals and seven trumpets). It is written that “the mystery of God is ended with the seventh trumpet” (See Revelation 10:7 and 11:11-19). It is certain that even up until our present day, not all of the events in Revelation 4-11 have come to pass.

11. Most, if not all, of the Revelation 12 passage seems to have already taken place in the first century AD. The vision tells the story of how Jesus came into the world through the Jewish people. The woman (messianic Israel) gave birth to the male child, then afterward he was taken up to heaven. The dragon was cast down to the earth, and he tried to destroy the woman (messianic Israel), but the woman survived. The messianic believers were delivered from being destroyed in the war with Rome from 66 to 70 AD. They fled to Pella in Jordan during the war, and later they were able to return to Judea (This may have involved the 1,260 days and 3.5 years in Rev. 12:6 and 12:13-17). After the period when he was trying to destroy the woman, the dragon went off to make war with the other descendants of the woman (Gentile Christians - Rev. 12:17). It is possible that the book of Revelation was written before these events, that is before 70 AD. Some Bible teachers try to place the events of Rev. 12:13-17 in

a still future time. There are differing views concerning this passage.

Many things about end-times prophecy have become speculative. However, Jesus will come again someday, and there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars concerning his coming (Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12-17). However, the recent speculations about Revelation 12 are not the signs of the end indicated by the Messiah. Jesus did originate in believing Israel (the woman), he ascended to heaven, he reigns, and he will return.

YouTube videos usually show one version of the constellation Virgo. However, in ancient times, there were divergent ideas concerning the region of the sky called “Virgo.” The Babylonians thought of it as the constellations they called the “Seed Furrow” (AB.SIN) and the “FronD.” The two constellations were associated with the grain goddess, Shala, and the goddess of the date harvest, Erua. The goddesses stood across the ecliptic (the path of the sun); they did not lay on the ecliptic as the western (Greek) Virgo does. From a Babylonian perspective, and that of the men who became the Magi of Matthew 2, there could have never been a moment when the moon would have been at the feet of the principal goddess named Shala. The goddess Shala’s feet were positioned below the southernmost possible location of the moon (see below).



Endnotes

Introduction :

1 The author attended the colloquium. Most of the papers presented during the event are found in the following book: Barthel, Peter, and George Van Kooten, eds. *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy*. (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

2 Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem: the Legacy of the Magi*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

3 Ernest L. Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World*. Second Edition; (Portland, Oregon: ASK Publications, 1996).

Fredrick Larson, *The Star of Bethlehem*, (Santa Monica, CA, Genius Products, 2007). DVD

4 Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem*, (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2015). Unfortunately, Dr. Nicholl associates his theory with speculations about Revelation 12 and the constellation Virgo (See Appendix 4 in this book). He also assumes that the Magi would have been waiting for a heavenly sign concerning the Messiah. As demonstrated on pages 6-7 in this book it is very doubtful that the Magi were waiting for any such celestial signs concerning the Jewish Messiah. Another major problem with Dr. Nicholl's presentation is that he compresses the time necessary for the Magi's reflection and travel to an absolute minimum. In his scenario, the men hardly have time to think, rest, or consult others. According to his theory, within days, the men are thrust into a long, difficult, dangerous and expensive journey. It is unrealistic.

PART 1 : The Traditional Perspective

5 Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew 2*, sections 3 and 4.

6 See Job 9:9, 26:13, 38:31-32 and Amos 5:8. Astrology and celestial divination are denounced in 2 Kings 17:16 and 21:1-9f; 2 Chronicles 33:1-6; Jeremiah 8:2; Zephaniah 1:4-6 and Acts 7:42-43.

7 John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010).

PART 2 : A Key Text

8 The word in Matthew 2:9 was conjugated as προηγεν (Imperfect, Indicative, Active, 3rd Person, Singular). In some contexts the word can mean "to lead forth" as well.

9 Present, Infinitive, Active

10 Future, Indicative, Active, 1st Person, Singular

11 Present, Indicative, Active, 3rd Person, Singular

12 The word "proago" is also used in Matthew 21 :9 and 21 :31. In the first passage, part of a crowd was going ahead of Jesus. In the second, it is written that prostitutes will get into the kingdom "chronologically" ahead of others.

13 Aorist: This verb form is said to be "simple occurrence" or "summary occurrence", without regard for the amount of time taken to accomplish the action. It is the 'punctiliar' tense, meaning as 'viewed as a collective whole,' or a "one-point-in-time" action, although it may actually take place over a longer period.

14 Or "from the star's rising," if one insists on that translation.

15 Imperfect: The imperfect tense shows continuous or linear type of action. It always indicates an action continually or repeatedly happening in past time.

PART 3 : Chronology: Dating the Birth of Jesus and the Star

16 Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) page 291, Table 139.

17 It is widely acknowledged that Josephus' olympiadic date marker for Herod's nomination is in error. It is assumed in this booklet that Josephus' consular dates are also in error. See Emil Schürer, Géza Vermès, and Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), p. 281, note 3.

The Parthian invasion of Syria, Lebanon and lower Turkey did take place in 40 BC. However, apparently the Parthians consolidated their gains before intervening in Judaea. The Parthians did this toward the time of Pentecost in 39 BC. The Parthian intervention in Judaea was more like a coup d'état than an invasion.

18 The author's book, *The Lion Led the Way*, has an extensive historical section, part of which is available on the website: www.star-of-bethlehem.info (See the "Timeline" and "Resources" menus).

Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Sections 474-569.

W. E. Filmer, "Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great", *Journal of Theological Studies* ns 17 (1966), pp. 283-298.

Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: a Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2011) 219-256.

Andrew E. Steinmann, "When Did Herod the Great Reign?", *Novum Testamentum*, Volume 51, Number 1, 2009, pp. 1-29.

19 See the following works concerning the dating of Christmas:

Louis Duchesne, *Origines du culte chrétien*, 5th ed. (Paris: Thorin et Fontemoing, 1925), 275-279.

Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, page 320-328, § 552-569.

Andrew McGowan, "How December 25 Became Christmas" *Biblical Archaeology Society*, Web.12/07/2012: www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/how-december-25-became-christmas.

Maxwell E. Johnson, *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 265-347.

Roll, Susan K.. *Toward the Origins of Christmas*. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Pub. House, 1995.

Thomas J. Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 85-140.

Simmons, Kurt M. K. "The Origins of Christmas and the Date of Christ's Birth." *JETS* 58.2 (2015): 299-324.

20 Some of the historic denominations which celebrate Gabriel's announcement and the incarnation of Jesus at his conception are the following: Catholic Church, Anglican, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental and Eastern Catholic.

21 See Maier, Paul L. *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), pages 28-29.

A passage in the Jewish Mishnah states that some sheep pastured near Bethlehem were destined for sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, and suggests that these flocks lay out in the fields all year around.

"Since shepherding seems to be one of the least changed occupations in Palestine over the last two thousand years, it may be instructive to gauge the present practice. The famed Chautauqua and Lyceum lecturer, Stephen A. Haboush, the 'Shepherd Boy of Galilee' writes: As a boy, I kept our flock through

the fall of the year and up to the first of January out among the low hills and valleys around the Sea of Galilee. But during the rainy season in January and February I would keep the sheep in the fold back of our home in Tiberias. In Judea, where, there is only half as much annual rainfall, the shepherds keep their flocks grazing out in the valleys for most of the months of the winter season, as I know from members of my tribe."

And Christmastime visitors to Bethlehem today tell of seeing shepherds out in the fields with their sheep, their heads muffled against the chilly weather in colorful keffiyehs. (See other references on the next page as well.)

There are a vast number of rumors concerning the origins of the Christmas celebrations. However, in Church history, the date of Jesus' conception at Passover was the basis for his winter birthdate. Census taking in December or January would not have been difficult in the land of Israel. Winter is an excellent time to have a census in agricultural contexts because farming activities are at a minimum. Abraham lived in tents all year round near Bethlehem. He also had vast flocks of unsheltered sheep.

22 Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) page 319, § 548. Quote: "According to the papyrus codex Bodmer V, attributed to the third century AD, when the Magi came they saw the child Jesus "standing by his mother Mary's side."

23 The accounts of Matthew and Luke are complementary, not contradictory.

PART 4: Understanding the Prophetic Context _____

24 The Parthian Empire was composed of Babylonians, Greeks, Jews, Persians, Medians, Parthians and others. Despite their origins in Central Asia, the Parthian royal house was particularly friendly to Greeks.

25 The Targums

26 The following texts could also have been important to the Magi: Deuteronomy 18:15-19, 2 Samuel 7:4 and 7:12-16, Psalm 110:1, Psalm 72:1-17, Isaiah 11:1-10, Micah 5:2-5, Malachi 4:2 and possibly portions of the apocryphal Book of Enoch. The strong connections of the heavens with Daniel 9:24-27 and other texts are explored in the author's other works, especially *The Lion Led the Way*.

PART 5: Eastern Astronomy

27 It has been speculated that the wise men were kings based on an interpretation of Psalm 72:10-11, where Solomon prays that the kings of Tarshish, Sheba and Seba would offer gifts to his descendant. Similar gifts to those of the Magi are also mentioned in Isaiah 60:5-6. But neither one of these texts seems to be directly related to Matthew's wise men. However, the men may have been inspired to bring certain gifts because of the passages.

28 David Pingree, "Astronomy And Astrology In India And Iran," *Isis* Vol. 54 No. 2 (June 1963), 241.

29 The author is thinking in particular of the following:

Abraham Sachs and Hermann Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia. Volumes 1-7*. (Vienna: Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1988-2014) This series amounts to at least 3,500 pages.

Mathieu Ossendrijver, *Babylonian Mathematical Astronomy Procedure Texts*. (New York, NY: Springer, 2012). (This document is about 600 pages long).

A good overview of Babylonian astronomy may be found at: www.caeno.org (articles under astronomy / feat of clay).

30 Marco Polo was aided in writing the stories of his travel experiences by a notable 13th-century writer of novels, Rustichello da Pisa. It is probable that some of Polo's accounts were either invented tales or enhanced accounts.

31 Ossendrijver, M. "Ancient Babylonian Astronomers Calculated Jupiter's Position from the Area under a Time-velocity Graph." *Science* 351.6272 (2016): 482-84.

PART 6: A Jewish and Babylonian Candidate for the Star

32 Courtney Roberts, *The Star of the Magi*. (Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, Career Press, 2007), 120.

33 MUL.BABBAR is the modern transliteration of the original cuneiform logograms. The name apparently has very ancient Sumerian origins.

34 See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, Online edition: www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_156.html#PARTb (The reader should see parts A and B).

35 Mathieu Ossendrijver, *Babylonian Mathematical Astronomy Procedure Texts*, (New York, NY: Springer, 2012), pp. 56-58.

36 www.alcyone.de

37 Concerning the sun's position in the zodiac and each day, see:

Mathieu Ossendrijver, *Babylonian Mathematical Astronomy Procedure Texts*, (New York, NY: Springer, 2012), pages 145, 180-181 and 189.

Otto Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2d ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 121.

38 It is just possible that such an event may have also taken place 83 years previously in 86 BC. However, it was completely impossible before that date. The 3 BC event was the optimal time for Jupiter's heliacal rising to take place at the same time as the Sun's conjunction with Regulus. See *The Lion Led the Way*, pages 198-199 and 336-337.

39 Ernest L. Martin mistakenly indicated that the conjunction happened on September 12th. His astronomy software in the 1990s would not have been very powerful. F. Larson repeated Martin's mistake in his star theory.

40 Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20 and 7:17, 21.

41 This incident was at the heart of Ernest Martin's and Frederick Larson's star theories.

42 The star was located at an altitude of over 60° for several hours each night. Its highest point was at 67.5° toward 4:00 AM local time (3/4 of the way to the zenith, well above the heads of the Magi).

43 When Matthew writes, "the star stood over the place where the child was," he is not specifically writing about anything besides the brut fact that the star was present in the sky above Judaea at the time of the wise men's visit to Bethlehem. The star dominated the skies, it was "standing" over Judaea and Bethlehem at a high altitude for a large part of the night. Matthew was not specifically writing about Jupiter's stationary phase in his gospel. Matthew was only using very simple terminology. However, Jupiter's stationary phase in December 2 BC could have provided the symbolism, which was necessary to cause the wise men to rejoice. The coincidence of Jupiter's stationary phase with the Magi's visit to Bethlehem could have easily been interpreted as an affirmation that the child was indeed in the small Judaeian town. Seeing the star in this particular circumstance "standing over" the town would have caused the men to believe that they were very near to achieving the goal of their quest. Their joy would have been immense.

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A Jewish and Babylonian Perspective About the Star of Bethlehem

The biblical account of the wise men and the star that announced the coming of the Messiah of Israel has inspired and puzzled people for two millennia. Important aspects of Babylonian astronomy seem to be involved in understanding the star's appearing. But in addition, this short book also explores the men and events from a profoundly Jewish perspective. The traditional Jewish names of stars and planets, Jewish symbols, as well as Jewish dates, all seem to be keys to unlocking the mystery of the famous star.

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Book website: www.star-of-bethlehem.info



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Dwight has written academic work of almost 400 pages about The Star of Bethlehem entitled, *The Lion Led the Way*. A historical novel, *MUL.BABBAR, the White Star Over Bethlehem* is in preparation.



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