

We Have Seen His Star

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:1,2

IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW is found the first information recorded in the New Testament that pertains to the genealogy and birth of Jesus. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1) As the world’s future king, the record of his royal lineage through David was thus established. Messiah was also the promised true seed of Abraham, and the covenant arrangement that God made with him to bless all nations of the world at a future time. (Gen. 22:16-18) Our featured scripture relates to the wise men (Magi) who had journeyed from the east to Jerusalem to learn the exact location where they could find the newborn King of the Jews.

Many centuries earlier, Jacob had identified the tribe of Judah from which the Messiah would come. He proclaimed, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10) The scepter, or right to rule, would come from the tribe of Judah, and of the family of King David. Judah was the strong one, the lion's whelp (Gen. 49:9), and "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David."—Rev. 5:5

The term 'Shiloh' relates to an epithet that points to the Messiah and means tranquility, or peace. Thus did the Prophet Isaiah identify Jesus as the 'Prince of Peace' in his prophecy concerning him. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."—Isa. 9:6

BETHLEHEM

When news of the Magi's visit reached the royal court, King Herod pretended to be interested in where Jesus was born, while secretly planning to have him killed. Matthew records, "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of

thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”—Matt. 2:3-6

We note that the wise men from the east had been led to Jerusalem by observing a particular star, “there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” (Num. 24:17) When Herod asked them to join him and the religious leaders of Israel to determine where Messiah was to be born, the combined answer from the group was also established by the Scriptures. They proclaimed what God’s prophet Micah had written centuries before, saying, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”—Mic. 5:2

When Herod’s meeting ended, the Magi set out for Bethlehem, and we learn the details in Matthew’s account. “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matt. 2:9-11) The wise men did not return to inform Herod the whereabouts of the Christ child.

PROPHETIC FOREGLEAMS

In the Bible’s earliest records written by Moses, is recorded a wonderful prophecy concerning the

future Messiah. It is written, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” (Deut. 18:15) Moses was a servant of God, and he served to illustrate the grander prophet, our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. It is further written of him, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”—vss. 18,19

ESTABLISHED BY GOD’S WORD

The records contained in God’s Holy Word establish Jesus’ lineage through the tribe of Judah and family of David. It is also shown that he is the anti-typical seed of Abraham in whom all nations shall be blessed during his future kingdom. The Scriptures reveal that the baby Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. However, it was not until the angel Gabriel was sent by God in answer to Daniel’s prayer, that any definite time for Messiah’s arrival was indicated.

Servants of God were directed by the Holy Spirit as they wrote, but did not always understand what they were recording. The Apostle Peter confirms that many of the writers of Old Testament prophecies searched diligently to understand the meaning of what they were writing, and the time during which it would be accomplished. (I Pet. 1:10,11) Again, in his second letter, he wrote, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you

do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."—II Pet.1:19-21, *New American Standard Bible*

DANIEL SEEKS UNDERSTANDING

The Prophet Jeremiah had written, "Thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." (Jer. 29:10) The Prophet Daniel was a devout and careful student of scripture and had studied Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Israel's release from Babylonian captivity and the seventy-year prophecy.

Daniel was very concerned about the Jewish people and their welfare, and was especially anxious to learn more about the seventy years of which Jeremiah spoke. In his own book of prophecy, Daniel spoke of his interest in Jeremiah, and said, "In the first year of his [Darius'] reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."—Dan. 9:2,3

In his prayer, Daniel made a detailed petition to the Heavenly Father in which he sought forgiveness for his people, concern on their behalf, and

enlightenment in connection with the seventy-week prophecy. (vss. 3-19) We learn that even before he had finished his prayer, God had sent the angel Gabriel to help him. He wrote, "Whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man [angel] Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding."—vss. 20-22

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

Gabriel began to explain to Daniel the meaning of the seventy-week time period. (vss. 24-27) However, to understand Bible prophecy it is necessary to use one of the keys that has been provided in the Scriptures, and we learn that one day represents one year. "Your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise."—Num. 14:33,34

There are 7 days in one week, thus there are 490 days in 70 weeks. Using the Bible's key, the 490 days points to 490 years that was set apart as a period of favor to the Jewish people. Gabriel spoke the words of God, "Know therefore and understand,

that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”—Dan. 9:25

The 490 year time period (70 weeks) began when Israel was released from Babylonian captivity and would culminate with the first advent of ‘Messiah the Prince.’ Further details in Gabriel’s message indicated that Jesus would die in the middle of the last ‘week of years’ and that Israel’s period of favor would end three and a half years later. At that time their house would be left desolate.—Matt.23:38

JOHN’S MINISTRY

An important source of information concerning our Lord’s First Advent concerns the ministry of John the Baptist. During his ministry, he aroused new and widespread interest, not only among the Jews, but also in the Gentile world. “Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ, John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ So with many other exhortations also he preached the gospel to the people.”—Luke 3:15-18, *NASB*

JOHN NOT THE MESSIAH

Many thought that John was the Messiah, “This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”—John 1:19-23

THE MAGI VISIT JESUS

The wise men from the east shared in the announcement of the birth of the world’s Savior. They were upright and devout men of faith, and had come with respect and reverence to worship the newborn King of Israel. They had brought gifts of myrrh, frankincense, and gold, and, although the scriptural record does not state how many men there were, it is likely there were three inasmuch as there were three gifts for Jesus.

Neither did the wise men return to Jerusalem to inform Herod the exact location of Jesus’ whereabouts. Instead, they returned to their homeland by another way to foil any attempt for him to follow after them. “Being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Matt. 2:12) In contrast, it is noted that none of the religious leaders of Israel or other Jews had gone to Bethlehem to visit Israel’s newborn king.

The term Magi was used as the name for priests and wise men among the ancient Medes, Persians, and Babylonians. Astrologers were also included among them. Together they formed a group of learned scholars who were versed in various disciplines. These were the natural sciences, medicine, and astrology. It also included those of the occult, such as Chaldeans, sorcerers, and soothsayers. When Nebuchadnezzar called for all of the wise men to interpret his dream, the scriptural record says, "Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers."—Dan. 4:7

It is thought that the wise men who arrived in Jerusalem came from Babylon and the very court of King Nebuchadnezzar. If so, they were perhaps acquainted with the writings of Daniel and his time prophecies relating to the future Messiah. Daniel and his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been closely associated with the court of Babylon, and no doubt left their influence in the world's first empire. News and information could have been carried from there to many other places.

In Daniel's book, he mentions the Magi on several occasions. Of particular interest, we read, "The king [Nebuchadnezzar] made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon."—Dan. 2:48

As students of astrology, the wise men were interested in reading the events of men and nations in the arrangement of the stars and galaxies. The heavens have been the great book of God, as the

psalmist, David, has written, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Ps. 19:1,2) In any event, the Magi had gained enough information from various sources to observe a particular star which was to indicate the time and place where Messiah was to be born. On their way to Bethlehem, the star guided them again. “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”—Matt. 2:9-11

KING HEROD

From secular history, we learn that Herod was the name of a family of political leaders who ruled over the people of Israel, but who were not Jews themselves. The progenitor of the Herods was Antipater, who had been made governor of Idumea. His son Antipas was the father of Herod the Great.

The Scriptures provide little information about Herod, other than to inform us that when the Magi arrived at Jerusalem in search of Israel’s newborn king, the news soon spread to the royal palace and to the king himself. When he heard the news he, as well as the whole city, were troubled. Perhaps he felt a sense of jealousy that anyone else might

possibly share a measure of his royal honors and dignities. This would be unacceptable and would detract from his own sense of importance and influence.

It was also Herod's intention to have Jesus murdered. "Being warned of God in a dream that they [the Magi] should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt."—Matt. 2:12-14

Matthew records the tragic events that followed. We read, "And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."—vss. 15-18; Jer. 31:15

HEROD'S DEATH

"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."—vss. 19-23

THE SHEPHERDS

Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem to pay their taxes, "So it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."—Luke 2:6,7

Luke records, "There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."—vss. 8-12

THE HEAVENLY HOST

They were not prepared for the glory that followed—"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds."—vss.13-18

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The brilliant star which had guided the Magi to Jesus was but a foregleam of the greater light which had come into the world. Zechariah had written, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9, *NASB*) In fulfillment of this great event, Matthew recorded, "Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"—Matt. 21:4,5, *NASB*

Matthew recalled a prophecy of Isaiah (9:2) in his gospel account—"The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." (Matt. 4:14-16) Luke spoke of Jesus as "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:32) John wrote, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:4,5) "Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."—I John 2:8

WE HAVE SEEN HIS STAR

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."—Matt. 2:1,2 ■