

THE “MAGOI” FROM THE EAST

EVENTS IN HISTORY FORESHADOWING FUTURE EVENTS

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“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.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matt. 2:1-3).

Slightly over one hundred and fifty years ago a minister wrote the lyrics to a carol, based on the preceding and subsequent verses — “We Three Kings of Orient Are” (also the lead line in the carol).

This carol was supposedly written for the Christmas pageant of a seminary in New York City, and, over the years, has become somewhat entrenched among popular carols sung during “the Christmas season”; also note parts of this carol depicted in Nativity scenes.

But, how much of the beginning line, forming the title of the carol, is in accordance with that stated in the Scripture verses upon which it is based? Or, for that matter, how much of this complete carol relates the true story set forth in the account?

And, to answer those questions is a simple matter. Just read the verses in Matt. 2:1-12, the only place in the four gospels where this account is recorded.

In short, *there is really NOTHING in Scripture about anything even stated in the lead line. There is NOTHING stated about there being three men, there is NOTHING stated about these men being*

kings, and there is NOTHING stated about these men being from the Orient (unless “the Orient” is understood to include the Middle East [some definitions of “the Orient” include the Middle East, others only that part of Asia beyond the Middle East]).

Their “number” in the carol is derived from the three gifts which they brought (v. 11), though *that says NOTHING* about the number of those bringing these gifts. There could have been three, but more likely there would have been at least a small caravan. But, again, *their number is NOT given.*

The thought of these men being “kings” though is where things really go awry in the carol. The word identifying them in the Greek text is *magoi* (a plural noun). And *the magoi* of that day were knowledgeable individuals who studied the heavens, interpreted dreams, visions, etc.

Astrologers would be one form of those described by this word; but the actions *of the magoi* in the account, in connection *with a particular star*, would appear to place them more in the category of astronomers rather than astrologers.

Then, beyond the preceding, they were acting upon that which the appearance of this particular star portended (“his star,” an evident reference to Num. 24:17, a Messianic passage), and they were looking for the One about Whom the Messianic passage spoke — the King of the Jews. Thus, *their actions were completely within Scriptural guidelines.*

Then, the thought of these *magoi* being from the Orient in the carol is misleading at best. Scripture relates that they were from the East, which, for several reasons, was probably in the area of Babylon.

These *magoi* were undoubtedly “Jews,” for Gentiles wouldn’t be believing and acting in the preceding manner, searching for the King of the Jews.

(Note that the northern ten tribes had been carried away captive by the Assyrians beginning about 722 BC. Then, about a century later, between about 625 and 605 BC, Nebopolassar, ruling the kingdom lying south of and bordering the Assyrian kingdom, the Babylonian kingdom, progressively conquered the Assyrian kingdom.

Then, upon Nebopolassar’s death in 605 BC, his son, Nebuchadnezzar, took control of the kingdom, turned his attention toward the southern two tribes in Israel (Judah and Benjamin), and began transporting these two tribes east into the Babylonian kingdom.

And, with the previous carrying away of the northern ten tribes by the Assyrian kingdom, and the subsequent conquest of this kingdom by Babylon, this essentially *left ALL twelve tribes NOT ONLY removed from their land BUT in the same general part of the Gentile world during these early years of the diaspora.)*

And, along with *the magoi* undoubtedly being Jews in *the diaspora*, Babylon, in that day, *was a center for astronomy and astrology.*

Thus, with all of the previous in mind, seeing *the magoi* as Jews coming from the area of Babylon, east of Jerusalem, would be a very natural deduction. In fact, since *the magoi* were evidently Jews, and they had come from the East, Babylon, as their place of origin, is about the only part of the world which could really even be considered.

History Foreshadowing the Future

There is more to Matt. 2:1-12 than just the story of *magoi* from the East realizing certain things through the appearance of a star, then traveling to Jerusalem bearing gifts for the One born King of the Jews.

The historical account is far more than just a contingent of Jews leaving the land of their dispersion, bearing some semblance of wealth derived from their association with the Gentiles (shown by their expensive gifts) and returning to their own land, seeking their King.

This account foreshadows that coming day when this same thing will happen again — the Jewish people leaving the lands of their dispersion, *bearing NOT JUST some semblance of wealth BUT bearing ALL THE WEALTH of the Gentiles, and RETURNING to their own land, SEEKING their King.*

As in the account of Jacob and Laban in Gen. 29:1-31:3, Jacob, removed from his own land, finding himself in “the land of the people of the east,” progressively became wealthy at Laban’s expense,

though Laban, as well, was blessed because of Jacob's presence (Gen. 30:27ff).

Ultimately though, *Jacob returned to his own land with ALL of Laban's wealth* (Gen. 30:43-31:3).

Israel and the Gentile nations, foreshadowed by the experiences of *Jacob and Laban* in Gen. 29:1-31:3, are presently enjoying riches at one another's expense — the Gentile nations becoming rich at Israel's expense (Israel out of place, scattered among the nations), and Israel becoming rich at the Gentile nations' expense (*cf.* Rev. 17:1-4; 18:9-19).

But, as in the type, the day is coming when Israel, like Jacob, *is going to TAKE IT ALL — ALL the wealth of the Gentiles* (Isa. 60:1-12 [translate "forces" vv. 5, 11, KJV as "wealth"]). *And the Jewish people will return to their own land with this wealth.*

(For more information on the preceding, refer to the author's pamphlet, "Time of Israel's Restoration.")

Also, this will involve *ALL Jews living in that day*, for those presently in the land [the 6,000,000 Jews forming the present nation of Israel] will be uprooted from their land in the middle of the coming Tribulation, and the ones not killed will be driven back out among the nations with the rest of world Jewry.

God, in past history, because of continued sin and disobedience over centuries of time, uprooted His people from their land and drove them out among the nations *to effect repentance through Gentile persecution.*

And out among the nations is where God will deal with the whole house of Israel, NOT part of the house in the land and part scattered among the nations.

For more information on the preceding, refer to the author's pamphlets, "The Woman in the Ephah," "The Woman in Revelation," "A place in the Wilderness," and "The Turbulent Middle East," Parts I, II.)

And Israel *is NOT going to JUST return to her own land with all the wealth of the Gentiles.* Rather, they are going to see, recognize, and believe *ALL* which the appearance of the *Star* in Num. 24:17 portends, *subsequently finding themselves in the land with the One about Whom this Star spoke, the One Who will THEN hold the sceptre, their Saviour, Messiah, and King.*

In the account *of the magoi from a Gentile nation in the East*, they came in connection with the King's birth, at the time of His first coming.

In the account yet future, *the Jews from Gentile nations worldwide* will come in connection with the King's reign, at the time of His second coming.

Trouble in Jerusalem

When *the magoi* appeared in the streets of Jerusalem, asking about the One "born King of the Jews," *trouble ensued.* *NOT ONLY* was Herod troubled *BUT* "all Jerusalem" *was troubled with him* (vv. 2, 3).

It is understandable why Herod was troubled; his ruling position was being threatened. *BUT WHY* was "all Jerusalem" *troubled as well?* Being under Roman rule, *this should have been good news for them.*

The answer is evident. *Messiah had appeared, and they were NOT ready.*

And the reader can easily translated that into the actions of individuals near or at the time of Messiah's second appearance, whether dealing with Israel, Christians, or the Gentile nations.

Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh

"...they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matt. 3:11b).

The three gifts which *the magoi* brought, as well, speak volumes concerning both the King's first coming and His second coming.

"Gold," the first named gift, speaks of both *Deity* and *regality.* Wood in the tabernacle, for example, was overlaid with *pure gold;* and crowns worn by the twenty-four elders and Christ in the Book of Revelation are seen *as golden crowns* (4:4; 14:14).

"Frankincense," the second named gift, was a resinous gum which produced a strong, aromatic smell, *often used for medical purposes, health benefits.*

"Myrrh," the third named gift, also a resinous gum, produced a perfume-type smell. Myrrh was often used particularly for *embalming, health benefits, and as an ingredient in the anointing oil.*

When these three gifts are viewed together, one can't help but see that the same scenes which witnessed *Messiah's sufferings and humiliation* cry out for that coming day when they will, as well, witness *His glory and exaltation.*

In relation to the "gold," it was God Himself, in the person of His Son, who came to the nation the first time, as King, born in a stable.

But the day is coming when this same individual will return to the same nation, though this time He will be riding a white charger, holding the earth's sceptre, and be accompanied by the angelic armies of heaven to "judge and make war" (Rev. 19:11ff).

In relation to the "frankincense," Christ came the first time to offer *healing* for the nation, though rejected; and *He will one day return to bring about healing for a nation which will THEN accept Him.*

In relation to the "myrrh," Christ's first coming resulted in *rejection and death*, with His body wrapped in a mixture of "myrrh and aloes" (John 19:39).

And He will one day return, with the "myrrh" then associated with *healing and anointing oil*, pointing to *the One Who will provide healing for the nation, the "King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (Mal. 4:2; Rev. 19:16).

Thus, the account of *the magoi* from the East — the star which they saw in the East, their understanding of this star, and their subsequent actions relating to this star — speaks volumes about Israel and Israel's Messiah, extending from the time of Christ's incarnation to the time of His reign.

This pamphlet has only touched upon the volume of material which can be gleaned from the account. Others over centuries of time have dealt with the account, and others will yet deal with the account. But no one has ever taken anything from the account, and no one can ever do so.

The complete account is still there, like a virgin forest, awaiting any and all who pass this way and care to glean some of the riches contained therein.

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