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The Birth Series
The Magi

by haRold Smith
a citizen of the Commonwealth (Ephesians 2:19)

*"Now after Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, **wise men from the east** came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Hebrews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' (Micah 5:2)*



...wise men journey from the east

*"Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going **into the house** they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." Matthew 2:1-12*

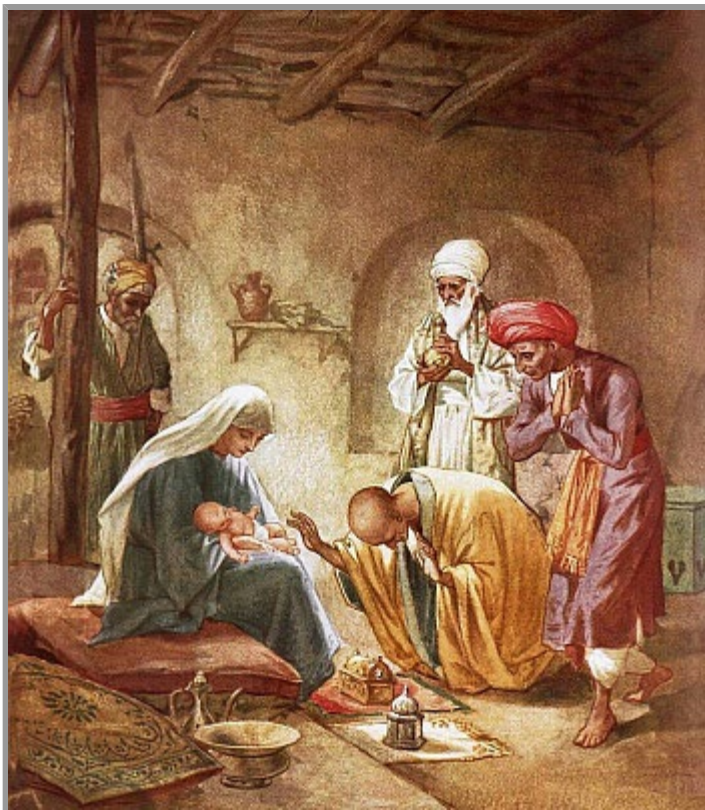
Just who were "the Magi"? It is important to understand that this word does not appear anywhere in scripture - only in religious tradition. Lots of speculation have labeled them as kings, princes, astrologers, priests or even Zoroastrians - none of which has any evidence of support. The one passage in scripture above where they are mentioned only refers to them as an unnumbered party of unnamed "wise men from the east". The word **magi** (**click on highlighted words to view content**) is the plural of the Latin *magus* which is borrowed from the Greek **magos** as used in the Greek text of the Gospel of Matthew and simply means "wise men" (it can also mean "sorcerers"). The identification of the wise men as kings is linked to Old Testament prophecies that seem to have the Messiah being worshiped by kings in **Isaiah 60:3**, **Psalms 72:10**, and **Psalms 68:29** (although not specifically mentioned). Early biblical scholars *reinterpreted* Matthew in light of these prophecies and elevated the wise men to kings although there is no scriptural or historical evidence to support that conclusion (it just sounds good). By 500 CE, all commentators had adopted the prevalent tradition that they were kings and limited to three in number in association with the three gifts mentioned. According to the historical record, however, the wise men recorded in scripture were **Hebrews** looking for their **Hebrew** Messiah - and there would have most probably been a contingent of them traveling together over that distance for safety. So, if they were Hebrews - how did they get to "the east"?

Suffering mightily under the Assyrians, the city of Babylon finally rose up against its hated enemy and burned to the ground the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. The chief of the Babylonians was Nabopolassar who was succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BCE). Nebuchadnezzar was the equal of all the great Mesopotamian conquerors, from Sargon onwards; he not only prevented major powers such as Egypt and Syria from making inroads on his territory, he also conquered the Phoenicians and the state of Judah (586 BCE) which was the **southern Hebrew kingdom** that remained after the subjugation of Israel, the northern kingdom, by the **Assyrians**. In order to secure the territory of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar brought Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the two kings of Judah (in succession) and held them in Babylon. In keeping with Assyrian practice, the "New Babylonians," or Chaldeans forced a large part of the Hebrew population to

relocate. Numbering possibly up to 10,000, these Hebrew deportees were largely upper class people and craftspeople who never left the region but joined an already sizable Hebrew population who had earlier been transported to the region by the Assyrians.

The book of Daniel recounts how Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were brought in **exile to Babylon** with this Hebrew contingent after **King Nebuchadnezzar** put down the first Judean revolt in 597 **BCE**. **Chapter 5** relates the story of King Belshazzar, the successive son of Nebuchadnezzar, being killed and Darius the Mede becoming the king of Babylon incorporating it and its Hebrew contingent into the realm of Persia. Understanding that those of rank and power in the Middle East were often given dual surnames, as it still remains today - most probably Darius the Mede was also **Cyrus, King of Persia**. While the Babylonians ruled the world in the sixth century BCE, in the course of about half a century, they ceased to exist. This is remarkable enough, but it is even more astounding that their successors, the Persians, *had not existed before!* In 560 BCE, Cyrus the Great became the king of Persia, a small state in the Middle East, and within 30 years had replaced the Babylonian empire with his own. The Hebrew contingent that had been forced into the region by previous empires largely remained in this now Persian empire.

"Now after Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, 'Where is He who has been born king of the Hebrews? For we saw His star in the east' and have come to fall down before him'." Matthew 2:1-2



...paying homage to their king

To say they were "wise men" from "the east" in that day meant the sprawling empire that, although in decline with the rise of the Roman Empire, was still Persia (existing even today as Iran). These men had to be Torah keepers of the Hebrew contingent still living in Persia in order to be knowledgeable of the writings of the prophet Daniel because **Daniel 9:24-27** includes a prophecy giving a timeline for the birth of the Messiah and the subsequent destruction of the Temple. No one else would have even cared to examine these scriptures as it would not have been in their interest to do so. Traveling 800 to 900 miles to see the prophesied Messiah of Israel required having a consecrated commitment born out of the Hebrew scriptures. Only Hebrews with the determination to see their King would have been motivated to take up such an arduous journey. "Stars" are used throughout the *Tanakh* (OT) to reference the children of Israel (**Genesis 22:17, Exodus 32:13, 1Chronicles 27:23**) and, more specifically, a "prince". So, keeping Torah also gave them awareness of the prophecy of **Balaam** (who was from the town of Pethor on the Euphrates River near Persia). In **Numbers 24:17**, Balaam's prophecy

specifically mentions a "star coming out of Jacob" which references the Messiah - a person, **not a celestial event** (Jacob was the son of Abraham and Isaac, who was **renamed** "Israel" by YaHoVeH). To say, *"...we saw His star in the east"*, simply meant that while they were in the east (Persia) they saw events unfolding in Israel as prophesied by Daniel in the scriptures. These Hebrew men from Persia, steeped in the wisdom of Torah, were guided by YaHoVeH's Spirit to seek out YaHoVeH's promised Messiah in the land of Israel, the home of the family of Abraham, because they had become aware that YaHoVeH's "star had risen" there (**Matthew 2:2**) - meaning YaHoVeH's time had gained ascendancy in the personage of the Messiah.

It is a common misconception that the wise men visited Yeshua on the night of His birth - but, the account given in the Gospel of Matthew 2 does not state that they were present on the night of the birth of Yeshua. The Bible specifies no interval between the birth and the visit. Artistic depictions and the closeness of the traditional dates of December 25 and January 6 (the Christian observance of Epiphany) encourage the popular **assumption** that the visit took place the same winter as the birth, but the visit could be taken as occurring up to two winters later. This maximum interval would have explained Herod's command at **Matthew 2:16-18** - what became known as the massacre of the innocents that included boys up to two years old. In fact, the wise men came days, months, or possibly even years later. That is why **Matthew 2:11** says the wise men visited and

worshipped Yeshua *in a house*, not at [the birthing place](#).

Arriving in Jerusalem, they consulted with King Herod concerning the whereabouts of the Messiah - which discounts a physical "star" directly over a precise location as they were subsequently [directed to Bethlehem](#). There was some sort of apparition appearing periodically that was seen *only* by these traveling Hebrews, however, as [Matthew 2:9-10](#) says they followed **YaHoVeH's** guidance joyfully only when it *reappeared* after receiving those directions to Bethlehem. That Joseph, Mary and Yeshua would again be in Bethlehem at a later date would be consistent with a visit to the family home previously known as the threshing floor of Boaz. Mary and Joseph were both direct descendants of King David. Boaz was the great-grandfather of King David through whose [lineage came Joseph](#), wedded to Mary who was of [the lineage of Nathan](#), who gave birth to Yeshua known as *haMashiach* (Hebrew for the Messiah - [1Chronicles 2:12-15](#), [Matthew 1:5-6](#)). Boaz owned a home with a threshing floor in Bethlehem which, by right of inheritance, was handed down to succeeding generations within the lineage of David ([Ruth 2:4](#), [Ruth 3:1-2](#)). Having located their Messiah, the wise men then presented costly gifts as they fell before Him, thus fulfilling the prophecy of [Isaiah 60:6](#). The Greek word translated as the English "worship" in most modern translations is *proskyneo* which actually means, "to kneel or prostrate oneself to do homage (to one) or make obeisance." Kneeling, similar to bowing, is associated with submission and obeisance, particularly if one kneels before a person who is standing or sitting as the kneeling position renders a person defenseless and unable to flee. At the time, this veneration was typically used out of great respect for a king. In spite of Christianity's insistence to the contrary, these Magi were showing respect for *their King* - **not a god**.

*"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit **and in Truth**: for the Father seeks such to worship Him." John 4:23*

the Birth Series

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???Questions???

Please feel free to email me at harold@hethathasanear.com. While not claiming to have all the answers, it would be an honor to partake with you of what Spirit is uncovering.

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