

## “We Saw His Star in the East”

Putting yourself into the picture can definitely help you remember what you read and also help you see things that you might otherwise miss. As you get a picture in your mind of what was happening when the magi appeared in Jerusalem, your scene may be influenced by what you may have seen in a movie, book or on TV. But try not to let those things guide your imagination, since almost always the people who make the movies know little about the scriptures. On the other hand, the pictures that you begin to form in your own mind are only as accurate as your knowledge of the scriptures in general (not just of the passage you are reading), so you should always be ready to “change your scene” based on new information as it comes to you.

Consider the arrival of the magi in Jerusalem after the birth of Christ. Who were they? Where did they come from? How did they know which “star” would portend the birth of the “king of the Jews”? How could these strangers from the East create such a “troubling” of “all Jerusalem”? Although there may never be absolute answers to the questions we pose, without asking them, the journey to a fuller understanding can not even start. But as we pursue the knowledge of the scriptures, we must be careful to discern the difference between what we know happened and what might have happened. There is great value in knowing the difference between the two.

### Who were they?

Nobody seems knows for sure, but here is what we do know:

- Every ancient civilization has had their “wise men,” “magicians” “sooth-sayers” and “conjurers” in order for rulers to try to discern the divine will (what they should do, what shall be the future, etc.). It seems reasonable to conclude that if the counsel of these “wise men” was not correct more times than incorrect, some king sooner or later would realize it and stop using them.
- In Babylon, Daniel was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to be “head” or “chief” over this caste of men—Dan. 5:11 (see also 1:20; 2:2, 27; 4:7).  
In the above passages, in the LXX (the Septuagint), the word *magos* is among the words used. This is the same word used in the gospels for the magi.
- In Gen. 1:14, the luminaries in the heavens were placed there for signs, seasons, days and years. Note, not just for “seasons, days and years” but for signs, Heb. *oth* (Ex. 4:8–9, 17, 28, 30; Is. 7:14, 38:7–8, etc.).
- The magi, who came to Jerusalem, interpreted what they saw in the heavens to be “His star,” and they were correct in their conclusions.

### How did they know?

How they came to understand the truth about the birth of the “King of the Jews” probably can not be known for certain, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that God had pre-planned certain celestial events to occur that would be a sign to those who knew what to look for. And since Daniel was knowledgeable in these matters, it is not unreasonable that he would have passed along that information so that

certain future generations of Gentiles might also have a sign (as the Jews were given signs) of the birth of the One who was to come from long ago—even eternity (Micah 5:2)—to rule over both Jew and Gentile. Or it could be that God directly revealed it to the magi as He revealed himself to other Gentiles—Nebuchadnezzar for example, to whom one of the most significant Messianic prophecies was given in a dream in Dan. 2. (See also Dan. 4.)

### The Star of Israel

A. Review the story of Balaam (Num. 22–24)

B. Balaam’s fourth prophecy (24:10–25)

1. The prophecy will come to pass in the “end of days” (vs. 14). Heb., *acharith* <00319> the after-part, end. The Greek counterpart is *eschatos* last, end. See Gen. 49:1; in the LXX, the phrase is rendered, “last days” (e.g. Is. 2:2, exactly the same as in Acts 2:17, 2 Tim. 3:1) or, “[lend, latter] days,” Jer. 23:20, 49:39 (25:39 in LXX), Ez. 38:16, Hos. 3:5, Micah 4:1, etc. But the fact that Isaiah 2:2 is parallel to Micah 4:1 indicates the variations make little difference in the final meanings. The “end of days” of Balaam’s prophecy in the LXX is worded similarly to Heb. 1:2 (lit. “In the last of the days of these”) which is defined as the day of the Messiah. Thus Balaam’s prophecy can also be considered as fulfilled during that time.
2. In vs. 17 Balaam sees a star and a scepter arising from Israel which would possess its enemies (vs. 18-19).
  - a. The star is “not near” and “not now” because it (He) would come in “the end of days.”
  - b. One—not many, vs. 19—will rule. This One carries the scepter and will crush His enemies.
  - c. Although there are physical components and fulfillments connected with these kinds of prophecies (e.g., David’s possession of these places), it is also true that the destruction of nations is used to illustrate the reign of Messiah over the world.
    - 1) **Edom as symbolic of Gentiles.** Notice how different the English translation of the Hebrew in Amos 9:11–12 compares with the rendering James—guided by the Spirit—gives in Acts 15:13–18. In Amos, the “fallen booth of David” is resurrected and possesses the remnant of Edom. But James renders this as, “the rest of mankind,” and renders the possession not physical but spiritual. Thus, James uses it as confirmation that the Gentiles would be accepted into fellowship with Israel during the days of the gospel.
    - 2) In Hebrew, the words “Edom” and “Adam” (man, mankind) are similar enough (rendered differently by their vowel points), so that one could be used for the other in a kind of linguistic pun.

אָדָם (*adam*)

אֶדוֹם (*Edom*)

- 3) Review our study of Isaiah 2 where the word of the Lord goes forth from Jerusalem to all the nations. Notice again the structure of the chapter from verses 5–11 which speak to the house of Israel and verses 12–22 which speak to the Gentiles. Remember how there are two words for “man”: *adam* (ordinary man) and *ish* (man of importance)? Note vv. 9, 11, 17 and how they also apply to both the Jew and the Gentile. Yet these verses are in the language of physical destruction of people and things. But is God’s judgment really against the cedars of Lebanon and the Oaks of Bashan? Is the destruction of the ships of Tarshish really the kind of destruction under consideration here? Is it the Law of *Moses* (Heb. *torah*) which goes forth from Jerusalem to the nations (vs. 2) or is it God’s instruction of the *gospel* (cf. Luke 24:46–47)? Though the gospel is the message of salvation, the message of judgment must also be preached with it in order that people may know from what they are being offered salvation. In Isaiah, both judgment and salvation go forth—to the “Jew first and also to the Greek” (cf. Rom. 1:16, 2:9–10 and Acts 13:46).
3. James’ quote closely parallels the Septuagint renderings, but not the Hebrew (e.g., the Masoretic) text. Thus it appears that, understanding the metaphoric language better than we give them credit for, the translators of the Septuagint render these phrases in their meanings as they interpreted them to be taken, rather than in their literal sense. In this case, their rendering is correct, as validated by the Spirit through James’ quote.

### The time was right

Daniel, who was put in charge of the Babylonian wise men, also interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2, see esp. v. 44). Certainly, the Jews understood that since the time the armies of Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BC, the fourth kingdom of Daniels prophecy had come upon them! And, although Micah’s prophecy (Micah 5) predicted that the coming Messiah would vanquish the Assyrians (the enemy during Micah’s time), they must have understood that Assyria was representative of the nation that would be troubling Israel when He came. (Unfortunately for them, they did not pursue the metaphor to its full end, that the enemies of the Restored Israel were not physical, but spiritual—cf. 2 Cor. 10:2–3; Eph. 6:12).

### All Jerusalem troubled

The magi wouldn’t have just “popped in” to Herod’s palace to inquire about the King of the Jews; else the word might not have gotten around town so quickly. *“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.”* A king to be worshipped! Their words must have resonated within the psyche of all who were familiar with the prophecies and the “star of David” who would come. But had they understood that His true mission was not physical rulership, but spiritual, they would not have been troubled but joyful, nor would they have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7–8).