



The Quarry Gospel Church

BIBLE STUDY - 02.12.20

BIBLE STUDY - THE WISE MEN - Matthew 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 2:1-2 are key verses in learning about the wise men. They tell us:

- **The Identity of the wise men**
 - Idea of "kings" first seen in writings of those like of Tertullian (AD225);
 - Possibly influenced by the Old Testament prophecies;
(e.g. *Isaiah 49:7; Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:10-14*)
 - There are no names for them in Scripture.
- **Where they came from**
 - "East" here means Mesopotamia - probably Persia or Babylon.
- **Their focus - astronomy and prophecy**
 - They studied the heavens and tracked the stars;
 - They also studied ancient writings - they sought "The King of the Jews" - this could only come from O.T. prophecy;
 - Astronomy + prophecy leads to the realms of astrology (but not astrology as practised in horoscopes etc. today - discussed later in the notes).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE STORY?

1. This visit is not just a fable - It is a historical event.

- AD66 - Nero was also visited by magi;
- It was common for magi to visit great kings - very typical of the ancient world.

2. Babylon & Persia were where Israel had been taken into captivity

- 700BC - to Assyria; 500BC - to Babylon;
- then later both absorbed into Persia under rule of Cyrus.
- When Jews returned, many stayed behind in these places and so the wise men would have had access to a huge Jewish community together with their Scriptures and prophecies.
- They would have carefully recorded the stars and noted anything out of the ordinary, then use this information alongside the reading of ancient prophecies.

3. "His" Star stood out as "Unique"

- The star was so different that they followed it!
- They followed it - at great cost; over a long distance; through dangerous territory.

N.B. - A Note on Astronomy and Astrology

A) **Astronomy** - the study of the heavens.

We know today to a certain extent how big the universe might be - galaxy upon galaxy, billions of stars. People still today study the stars scientifically.

B) **Astrology 'Today'**

- Horoscopes etc. - star signs - all closely related to the occult.
This suggests - "The stars govern our lives"
- Christians should have nothing to do with modern day astrology. Why?
Because **God governs our lives - He is sovereign**: *Genesis 1:16; Psalm 8:3*.
The stars don't control us - **God controls the stars**: *Psalm 147:14; Amos 5:8*.
- We are forbidden to in any way attribute to the stars that which is God's -
Deut.4:19
Astrology 'Today' - is wrong for the Christian.

C) **The Astrology of the wise men**

- They did not participate in the astrology of today;
- For them there was no separation between astronomy and astrology:
 - Astronomy - scientific study of the heavens
 - Astrology - attributing reason and purpose to what they saw in the heavens
- THEY BELIEVED IN GOD! - We have come to worship Him
- As Christians we must believe that God uses the heavens to declare Himself to mankind and signify important events. (e.g. the crucifixion - the end times)
- The wise men: Looked at the heavens - observed - looked at God's word - obeyed - worshipped.

4. The number of wise men

- We don't know!
- all would have come with camels, beasts of burden, tents - a substantial visitation!
- a spectacular sight - hence Herod troubled and all Jerusalem with him!

5. The wise men visited "in the house" and the timing of their visit

- They did not visit in the stable;
- The crowd in Bethlehem would have dispersed soon after the census - no need to be in the stable;
- Joseph and Mary would have stayed in Bethlehem - rest - to have Jesus circumcised and later to present Him in the temple;
- At that presentation they gave "turtle doves" - they were poor, so unlikely that the wise men had already been with their generous valuable gifts; (*Luke 2*)
- Herod killed children up to 2 years old. Word for child = Greek word for "toddler" not "infant";
- Likely that wise men visited between 18months and 2 years after Jesus' birth;
- despite all the above - we don't know the exact time of their visit.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The main focus of the story and of the wise men - WORSHIP

- They came to worship Him;
- their gifts were part of their worship;
- they had studied and read and come to the conclusion a new King had been born
- a Divine King - the Messiah - whom they had searched for in the heavens and the scriptures.

BUT: When they got there Jesus was not who they thought He would be!

YET: They still gave their hearts to Jesus:

- a) in honour** *John 14:15 - obedience; Malachi 3:6-12 & Matthew 23:23 - tithe.*
- b) in worship** *Worship is about God not about us!*
- c) in sacrifice** *We are to be "living sacrifices", because Jesus sacrificed Himself for us; we must not "fall off the altar" but in obedience remain there. This takes discipline.*

LET US OFFER OUR HEARTS AFRESH TO GOD.