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A Delegation of Wise Men

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THE PHYSICAL BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST A DELEGATION OF WISE MEN

THE WISE MEN FILE

“Now after Jesus 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 Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him?’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel’” (Mt. 2:1-6).

“When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen 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 exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you 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 for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son’” (Mt. 2:9-15).

As can be seen, these verses record two journeys – the first from Persia to Bethlehem, the second from Bethlehem to Egypt.

- The journey of the wise men to Bethlehem

The wise men’s journey may be overviewed by attempting to answer nine key questions:

1. Who were these wise men? It is thought that they were perhaps a group of religious astronomers living in the Mesopotamian area.
2. How did they associate the star with Christ? There are several possibilities. In the fourteenth century B.C., a prophet from their area named Balaam had spoken of this star (see Num. 24:17). They also had the writings of Daniel, who had been prime minister of both Babylon and Persia some six centuries before Christ. Daniel, of course, wrote much about the Second Coming.

3. Why did they come? These men were doubtless acquainted with the various religions of the East and knew the emptiness of them all. It would seem that they followed this star to find peace and purpose for their lives.
4. When did they arrive in Bethlehem? It was perhaps not until some two years after the angels announced His birth to the shepherds. He is referred to as "*the young child*" (Mt. 2:9, 11, 13-14), and is not a tiny babe at this time. When Herod later attempted to destroy this unknown Babe, he had all children in the Bethlehem area two years and under slain (Mt. 2:16).
5. How many wise men came? There is no evidence that there were three. On the contrary, the group may have numbered from two to several hundred or more. Tradition, however, claims that there were but three and that their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.
6. Why did the star, after leading the wise men to Jerusalem, apparently disappear for a brief time and then reappear, taking them directly to Bethlehem? It may be that God intended this visit for the sake of the Jewish leaders. However, they had degenerated to such a level that they were unwilling to travel down the road a few miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see if their Messiah had really come. But here was a group of sincere Gentiles who had traveled across a hostile and extended desert to find Him.
7. Was the star a regular one? The astronomer Kepler said there was a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn about this time in history. However, by no stretch of the imagination could a planet or star located thousands of millions of miles from earth function in the precise way this star did as recorded by Matthew: "*The star. .. came and stood over where the young child was*" (Mt. 2:9). It is not at all unreasonable, however, to suggest that the star was actually a New Testament appearance of that Old Testament Shekinah Glory cloud that led Israel across the desert.
8. What gifts did they offer him?
 - a. They gave Him gold, which spoke of His deity.
 - b. They gave Him frankincense, which spoke of His humanity.
 - c. They gave Him myrrh, which spoke of His future sufferings. Reg Grant writes:

"During her life, Mary would see Jesus receive the gift of myrrh on five occasions; twice from Gentiles and three times from Jews.

 - (1) On the first occasion, the Magi brought myrrh from the East in honor of Jesus as King of kings (Mt. 2:11). This event anticipated the worship Christ will receive from the Gentile nations in the future kingdom.
 - (2) The second occasion found Jesus in the home of Simon the Pharisee receiving myrrh from the loving hand of a contrite woman who approached Jesus as her great High Priest, the One who could forgive her many sins (Lk. 7:36-50).

- (3) The third offering of myrrh came from the devout Mary of Bethany as she anointed Christ for His burial prior to his death. This showed that she understood the sacrificial nature of His ministry in a way that even his closest disciples had failed to grasp.
- (4) Just before the crucifixion, the Roman soldiers offered Christ a fourth 'gift' of myrrh mixed with wine—a kind of narcotic to dull the pain—but he refused it.
- (5) The fifth and final offering came from the hand of Nicodemus when he provided a mixture of myrrh and aloes for anointing Christ's body following his crucifixion." (Jn. 19:39) (*Kindred Spirit*, Winter 1988, pp. 13-14.)

9. Will a similar trip like this one be repeated in the future?

Some would answer in the affirmative, pointing to the prophecy of Isaiah:

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD" (Isa. 60:1-3, 6).

Thus, if a baby in a manger could command such worship, how much more the case of a king on his throne! Also, it should be noted that future kings will offer Him gold and frankincense, as did the wise men once brought, but not myrrh! But why this omission? Very simple – our resurrected Savior will never again suffer and die! Note His words of assurance to the Apostle John on the lonely Isle of Patmos:

"And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death'" (Rev. 1:17, 18).

- The journey of the holy family into Egypt

As has been noted in verses 13-15 the little family escapes into Egypt. A divine irony can be seen here. Consider:

- A. In the Old Testament God brought His Son (the Nation Israel; see Hosea 11:1) *out of* Egypt to escape the wrath of Pharaoh.
- B. In the New Testament God sent His Son (Jesus; Mt. 3:17) *into* Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod!

Satan is always a day late and a dollar short in his dealings with God! The words of the psalmist Asaph perhaps says it best:

"Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee . . . " (Psa. 76:10).

