

Some have written their conclusions which speculate these events are a possible explanation for what the Magi identified as “His star” and motivated them to organize a caravan to Jerusalem with confident expectation of finding and worshipping the Messiah of Israel.

If certain heavenly bodies are the key to determining the birth of Christ, then our ability to look back into the celestial sphere of two-thousand years ago is required. Our ability to do this is made possible by the computer program Starry Night Pro, Version 6.3.¹

The Magi were trained experts in astronomy. They had learned their profession from their predecessors and each had gained his own experience in reading the luminaries.

The Lord himself informed Adam what He meant in Genesis 1:14 when he referred to the “lights in the expanse of the heaven” as being for “signs” among other things.

David informs us about the celestial objects’ mission to silently communicate to us events of significance in the angelic conflict.

Psalm 19:1 - The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

v. 2 - Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

v. 3 - There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

v. 4 - Their line [**קו** (**qaw**): **architectural plan**] has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.

We are going to observe these phenomena silently “pour forth speech” and “reveal knowledge” that the trained eye can understand, but to those who have no interest the message will go unperceived although the phenomena may be clearly seen.

Among the heavenly bodies that will dominate this segment of our study are the constellations Leo and Virgo, the planets Jupiter and Venus, and the star Regulus.

There is a significant phenomenon typical of the movement of planets among the fixed stars called “retrogradation” that needs to be defined and explained.

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Retrograde motion is the orbital motion of a body in a direction opposite that which is normal to spatial bodies within a given system. "Retrograde" derives from the Latin words *retro*, backwards, and *gradus*, step.

In the solar system mostly everything rotates in the same sense: all major planets orbit the Sun counterclockwise as seen from the pole star Polaris. Most planets spin in the same sense, including Earth. The same happens with the orbital motions of the Moon, Mars' moons, and the biggest moons of Jupiter and Saturn around their planets. All these motions are called "direct" or "prograde."

Rotation in the opposite sense is called *retrograde*. Venus and Uranus spin clockwise, so they have a retrograde rotation. Some small moons orbit clockwise around their planet, and are called *retrograde satellites*. All these are the exception rather than the rule.

When we observe the sky, we expect most objects to appear to move in a particular direction with the passing of time. The apparent motion of most bodies in the sky is from east to west.

Retrograde motion should not be confused with retrogradation. The latter term is used in reference to the motion of the outer planets (Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and so forth).

Though these planets appear to move from east to west on a nightly basis in response to the spin of Earth, they are most of the time drifting slowly eastward with respect to the background of stars, which can be observed by noting the position of these planets for several nights in a row. This motion is normal for these planets, so it is called direct motion (not retrograde). However, since Earth completes its orbit in a shorter period of time than these outer planets, we occasionally overtake an outer planet, like a faster car on a multiple-lane highway. When this occurs, the planet we are passing will first appear to stop its eastward drift, and it will then appear to drift back toward the west. This is retrogradation, since the planet seems to be moving in a direction opposite to that which is typical for planets. Finally as Earth swings past the planet in its orbit, it appears to resume its normal west-to-east drift on successive nights.²

With at least a cursory understanding of retrogradation of planets viewed from platform Earth, there are a number of celestial objects that need to be introduced along with some specific events related to them.

The planet Jupiter was named by the Romans in honor of the chief god of their pantheon. However, the ancients had long regarded the solar system's largest planet as king of the planets.

² "Retrograde Orbit-Definition," WordIQ.com (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Retrograde_orbit).

If Jupiter is to qualify as “His star” then it must become involved in a number of events in association with other celestial objects that convince the Magi the Messiah is about to enter human history.

Such a sequence of events began to occur during the time of the Jewish New Year, *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* (ראש השנה). It falls on the first and second days of the month Tishri which begins the Days of Penitence, and ends on Tishri 10 with the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur* (יום כפור).

This equates on the Gentile calendar to September 3–13, 3 B.C. At that time Jupiter began to move toward the star Regulus and a conjunction in the constellation of Leo. Whereas Jesus is biblically described as the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah,” Leo is the “sign” of the King of Israel. Jupiter, because of its size, is considered to be the “king planet.” Regulus, Leo’s dominant star with a visual magnitude of 1.35, is ranked as the twenty-first brightest star viewed from earth. Because of this, Regulus is considered by some to be the “king star.”

Through images accessed from Starry Night Pro we are able to reconstruct the “signs” observed by the Magi. The conjunctions of Jupiter and Regulus in the constellation Leo can be reproduced in a sequential slide show to demonstrate the retrogradation of Jupiter and its three passes over Regulus.

Visual: ConjunctionNo1 09-3BC.Leo&Jup w Virgo

All planets rise in the east, as was stipulated by the Magi to Herod. This is referred to in astronomy as direct, or prograde, motion. They wander across the sky westward, but since the orbit of Earth is much faster than those of the superior or outer planets, this causes periodic retrogradation. For example, Earth advances on Jupiter, draws even with it, and then passes it. This causes an optical illusion that makes Jupiter appear to stop and then retrogress back eastward, and then, after a time, resume its westward journey.

Three such phenomena are rare enough but for them to occur over Regulus in the constellation Leo while precisely timed with Jewish feast days is incredible.

The Magi class had gained its expertise in the field of astronomy over centuries of knowledge passed down from those who preceded them among whom were Jews of three major Diasporas including quite possibly the prophet Daniel:

Daniel 2:48 - The king [**Nebuchadnezzar**] promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect [**סֵגָן segan: CEO**] over all the wise men [**חַכְכִּים chakkim: mantic**] of Babylon.

With regard to Daniel's response to Nebuchadnezzar's promotions, R. B. Thieme, Jr., has this comment:

The Scripture is silent on Daniel's response to the king's effusive reaction and opulent rewards. However, from our study of verse 30³ we know that Daniel took no credit to himself. What wisdom he had was purely God's grace provision. It is safe to assume that he exploited this opportunity to further proclaim the power and might of Jesus Christ.⁴

The word חַכְכִּים (*chakkim*) is an Aramaic term that refers to the court astrologers of Babylon, however, its application to Daniel in this passage needs further clarification.

In Daniel (1–2), Daniel appears as the archetypal Jewish mantic,⁵ who, like Joseph, outdoes his pagan colleagues and competitors in their own field; thus he is introduced (2:48) as chief of the foreign occultists. These latter are called “the wise men of Babylon,” in 2:48. Their function is reduced to a formula in 2:27 in the expression “make known the mystery.” Daniel, however, is able not only to “give interpretations” and “solve problems,” but also to “interpret dreams” and “explain riddles” (5:12). The exposition of chapter 1 ... combines the idea of such mantic wisdom with that of court education. Unlike Joseph, Daniel and his friends are cultivated in both, as is proper for aristocrats at the pagan court.

According to Daniel 2:19, however, because Nebuchadnezzar wants to have his apocalyptic dream not only interpreted but also guessed, Daniel receives a night vision that reveals the secret to him. Thus he becomes the prototype of the apocalyptic seer.⁶

The entire book of Daniel demonstrates Daniel's loyalty and fidelity to the God of Israel as he put his life on the line on several occasions in His defense. Often the court astrologers and soothsayers were asked by various kings to interpret their dreams, a branch of the occult known as oneiromancy.⁷

The soothsayers' interpretations were demonically influenced while Daniel's abilities in this area were divinely imputed.

³ “But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind” (Daniel 2:30, NASB).

⁴ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Daniel: Chapters One through Six*, 3d ed., (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1996), 62.

⁵ “Mantic” is an adjective relating to the faculty of divination. It comes from the Greek μάντις (*mantis*) which means “diviner, seer, prophet.”

⁶ H.-P. Müller, “חַכְכִּים *chakkam*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 4:377.

⁷ “Oneiromancy: the interpretation of dreams in order to foretell the future,” *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “oneiromancy.”

In light of Daniel's demonstrated integrity and the position of influence granted to him as "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48), i.e., the *chakkim*, plus evidence from legitimate observation of the heavenly "signs" by subsequent astronomers, it is logical to conclude that the Magi of Parthia were the beneficiaries of the training Daniel gave the mantics of Babylon.

The Magi were experts in the field of astronomy and the history of divine astronomy goes back to Adam, Seth, and Enoch. When one has knowledge of both the science of astronomy and the interpretation of the signs, then he who has eyes to see, is able to discern the message found in the stars. And so the extremely unusual performance of Jupiter's triple conjunction with Regulus in the constellation of Leo was one that caused the Magi to sit up and take notice.

The sequence began in early September when Jupiter, going from west to east, passed by Regulus forming a conjunction that almost united the two objects on the fourteenth: king planet merges with the king star in the king constellation.

In early February, Jupiter entered retrogradation and began a loop that would conjunct with Regulus twice more, February 2 B.C. during retrograde and then, after coming to a stop and resuming prograde, it conjuncted with Regulus a third time in May 2 B.C. completing the triple bypass.

Visual: Conjunction No2 02, 2BC-Jupiter & Regulus Midnight
Visual: Conjunction No3 04, 2B.C.Jupiter & Regulus in Leo

Hot on the heels of this stellar phenomenon, Venus joined the light show two weeks later when it entered the constellation of Leo. It streaked across the sky in a twenty-day dart, conjuncted with Regulus on June 11 and then moving on to conjunct Jupiter on June 17.

Visual: Conjunction-VenusWithRegulus&JupiterInLeo

The visual magnitudes of Jupiter, -2.70, and Venus, -4.40 is the brightest celestial event possible excepting the Sun (-26.8).⁸ By comparison the brightest star is Sirius with a visual magnitude of -1.46; Regulus is number twenty-one at +1.36.⁹

When the Magi added this event to the charts they began the previous September, they were able to calculate that the original conjunction of September 14, 3 B.C. of Jupiter with Regulus followed by Venus in Virgo who was clothed by the Sun with the Moon at her feet, indicated the virgin pregnancy

Added to this was Jupiter's second conjunction of Regulus on February 20, 2 B.C. followed by a third conjunction on May 12, 2 B.C.

⁸ <http://www.go-astronomy.com/planets.htm>

⁹ <http://www.atlasoftheuniverse.com/stars.html>

Once done, Venus made its sprint across Leo to conjunct with Jupiter on June 17 announcing the virgin birth with the night sky's brightest possible flare of light.

Seeing this and considering all the silent speech poured forth over the past nine months, the Magi concluded this was Messiah's star and began making plans to travel to Jerusalem.

We took a great deal of time researching the origin of the Magi and discovered they were Parthian officials, members of the upper house of the empire's senate. They were experts in the science of astronomy and had learned their craft from their predecessors who had been trained in reading the stars by those who subscribed to the Enochian School.

Their preparation for the journey to Jerusalem and the trip there, initially via the Silk Road, took six months to complete. It was late December when they arrived in Jerusalem and paid their call on Herod, an occasion reported only by Matthew.

Review: Matthew 2:1–12:

That the Holy Spirit would inspire Matthew to record this event means that it must contain important information about the Lord. Here is the expanded translation of the passage:

Matthew 2:1¹⁰ - After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea [17 June 2 B.C.] in the days of Herod the king, Magi from regions to the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,

In this verse Matthew confirms Micah's prophecy that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem and that it occurred during the reign of Herod the Great, king of the Jews. The Magi are identified as being from the east. We have documented they were from the Parthian Empire and specifically from its capital city of Hecatompylos.

Matthew 2:2 - "Where is presently He who has been born previously the King of the Jews? Because we saw His star in the east [ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ, *en téi anatólēi*: rising in the east¹¹] and we have come to prostrate ourselves before Him in worship as our superior."

¹⁰ The following translation of Matthew 2:1–12 has been expanded to present details from the original Greek that are not included in renderings by major English versions of the Bible.

¹¹ "Or 'in its rising,' referring to the astrological significance of a star in a particular portion of the sky. The term used for the "East" in verse 1 is ἀνατολαί (*anatolai*, a plural form that is used typically of the rising of the sun), while in verses 2 and 9 the singular ἀνατολή (*anatólē*) is used. The singular is typically used of the rising of a star and as such should not normally be translated "in the east" (*The Net Bible* [Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001], 1735tn15).