

Seiss Presents a Nova as a Sound Astronomical Explanation for the Star of Bethlehem but Is Handicapped by Incorrect Source Material; Corruption of Josephus's Manuscript in 1500s; Jack Finegan: Herod's Death Is Bracketed between a Lunar Eclipse & a Jewish Passover; Best Date Is 1 B.C.; Fred Larson Bio

Again, this is a logical explanation of a star that could be seen, then disappear, and later reappear. As a matter of record we need to observe Seiss's analysis but once done we will consider a critical piece of information, unknown to both Seiss and Faid, that disproves their conclusions.

How did these Magi come to know so much about Christ as an adorable King and Saviour? How came they to such full conviction that His birth had occurred in Judea? The true answer is: By the signs and constellations of the primeval astronomy, and the legends connected with them.

It is an astronomic fact, independent of all hypotheses, that at the precise hour of midnight, at the winter solstice [December 21], or the last week of December, in the period in which Christ was born, the sign of *Virgo*, everywhere and always regarded as the sign of the virgin-mother from whom the divine-human Redeemer-King was to be born, was just rising on the eastern horizon.

It is a further astronomical fact, independent of all hypotheses, that at the spring equinox [March 21] of the same period, just nine months earlier, this sign of the Virgin at midnight was on the meridian.<sup>1</sup> (p. 430)

It is a further independent astronomical fact that at the same date, at midnight, the stars of the little constellation of *Coma*, the special sign of the infant Seed of the woman, the Desire of nations, was likewise, along with the Virgin, directly on the meridian. (pp. 430–31)

Taken by themselves, they might not mean much; but if other particulars, to be named, duly fill out the picture, they would help to fix the heavenly tokens that the time had in very truth come in which the great Virgin-born Deliverer was to appear. (p. 431)

It is also a matter of record, among both Gentile and Jewish peoples, that the patriarch Seth, in whose day these heavenly signs were arranged and completed, gave out a prophecy in connection with them, that in the period in which the great promised One should be born there would appear a very bright star in the heavens.

This was perhaps the very prophecy traditional among the ancient Magi and Parsis [Zoroastrians], that there should come a heavenly Child to command the homage and obedience of mankind, the sign of whose birth would be the appearance of a new and peculiar star in the sign of Virgo. Likewise, the Jews also have always held and taught that Messiah's advent would be heralded by a new and peculiar star. (pp. 431–32)

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<sup>1</sup> “**Meridian:** the line in the sky that extends from the southern point on the horizon through the zenith (overhead point) to the northern point on the horizon, bisecting the sky into an eastern and western half. Objects are at their highest when they cross the meridian; the sun is on the meridian at local noon” (John Mosley, *Starry Night Companion: Your Guide to Understanding the Night Sky*, eds. Mike Parkes and Pedro Braganca [Toronto: Imaginova Corp., 2004], 182).

A NEW STAR. It is a matter of record that a new and peculiar star *did* make its appearance in the first Decan [the 30° segment of the sky that contains a constellation] of Virgo in the period preceding Christ's birth, and that it was so bright as to be visible even in the daytime. This star was in *Coma*, the sign of the Infant accompanying Virgo, and it marked the very head of the Infant. It was on the meridian at midnight at the spring equinox, just nine months before Christ was born, as again three months thereafter. Its brightness would necessarily arrest the attention of observers of the heavens, and awaken special interest in *Coma* and the Virgin-born Infant which that constellation signified both in figure and name.

The star itself would thus also be just what these Magi called the star by which they were led—namely, Christ's Star, emphatically "*His star*"; for it was a star of His particular constellation as the Desire of nations, and the peculiar star of His infancy, as it marked the Infant's head.<sup>2</sup> (p. 433)

This sign marked the virgin pregnancy, implemented by the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Further information is required, however, for this sign to take on significance. This is supplied by the conjunction of certain planets in a specific constellation. Seiss continues by addressing a subject we recently noted from Richard Allen's *Star Names* (see p. 237 above) and worth review here:

CONJUNCTIONS OF JUPITER AND SATURN. In the rabbinical commentaries of Abarbanel, Eliezer, and others great stress is laid on conjunctions of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. It is there also affirmed that about three years before the birth of Moses a conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn occurred in the sign of Pisces. By astronomical calculations we know that such a conjunction of these particular planets in that particular sign did take place about that period. According to Josephus and the rabbis, this sign was interpreted by the Egyptian astronomers and wise men as very favorable to the Jews and very unfavorable to the Egyptians.

Their sacred scribes, noted for their skill and sagacity in these things, came to the king insisting that it foretold the birth of a child among the Jews who, if allowed to live, would bring the Egyptian dominion very low, excel in virtue and glory, exalt the children of Israel to power and honor, and be remembered throughout the ages. (434–35)

Three things here come out with great clearness and conspicuity which deserve to be particularly noted: *first*, that the star-reading of a conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn betokened the birth of a great, virtuous, princely, and glorious operator among men, and the beginning or starting of a new order of things; *second*, that the sign in which the conjunction occurred indicated the people among whom the child was to be born; and *third*, that the children of Israel were already at that early period associated with the sign of Pisces. (p. 435)

Josephus says that it was in consequence of what the scribes augured from these indications that the decree went forth from Pharaoh to slay every male child that should be born during the time impending. (p. 436)

Now, if an individual and isolated conjunction of these two planets presaged the birth of one so illustrious as Moses ... what would be the dignity and glory of a Child whose birth is heralded by three successive conjunctions of these same planets in one and the same year? And yet this is what, in fact, did occur just before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>3</sup> (pp. 436–37)

<sup>2</sup> Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars*, 430–33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 434–37.

Dr. Seiss contends that the Star of Bethlehem is a nova located in the secondary constellation of Coma in Virgo's division of the Carousel. His documentation is exquisite and the arrangement of the constellations and planets he mentions are confirmed by the computer program Starry Night Pro: 6.3. However, he did not realize that the dates he consulted in 7 and 6 B.C. were based on the erroneous belief that King Herod died in the year 4 B.C., the key date in determining the birth of Christ. However, determining the date of Herod's death hinges on the identification of a lunar eclipse that occurred not long after his death.

The reason Seiss chose the wrong dates is that his references were flawed. All depends on which lunar eclipse is considered the one associated with Herod's death. Once determined then celestial phenomena described by our previous four writers must occur in such a way that the Magi would conclude the Messiah had been born in Israel.

The most respected work on biblical chronology has been done by Jack Finegan (1908–2000), former professor of New Testament History and Archaeology at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. The first edition of *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* was published in 1964 by Princeton University Press.

Over the course of the next thirty-five years Finegan continued to update his research, culminating in a revised edition published in 1998 by Hendrickson Publishers. One revision critical to our study addresses the death of Herod:

The widely accepted dating of the death of Herod the Great (is) 4 (or possibly 5) B.C. W. E. Filmer raised a serious question about the 4 B.C. date and proposed a date in 1 B.C. instead, and in 1978 and 1996 Ernest L. Martin advanced detailed arguments for the same date of 1 B.C. The subject of the date of Herod's death was thus brought to the front again, and much discussion has ensued. (p. 298)

Josephus tells us that an eclipse of the moon took place shortly before Herod died, and that the Jewish Passover came not long after his death. If the death of Herod is placed in 4 B.C. the eclipse in question can be identified with a partial lunar eclipse on March 12/13, allowing twenty-nine days until the Passover on April 11. Or if the death of Herod is placed in 5 B.C. the eclipse can be identified with a total lunar eclipse on September 15/16, allowing some seven months until Passover on April 17, 5 B.C. If the death of Herod was in 1 B.C.—the year we are now exploring as probable for the death of Herod—the relevant eclipse of the moon was a total eclipse on the night of January 9/10, and the full paschal moon of Nisan 14 was on April 8, [7 on the Gentile calendar] twelve and a half weeks later. (p. 299)

In the last period of Herod's life, between the eclipse shortly before he died and the Passover soon after his death, Josephus narrates many events. These are the following: (1) on the night of the eclipse Herod had two rabbis burned alive for involvement in the destruction of his golden eagle at the temple gate; (2) with his health worsening he traveled from Jericho to the hot baths of Callirrhoe \ka-lir'-ra-wē \ near the northeast end of the Dead Sea, (3) when numerous baths and additional immersion in a vat of warm oil failed to bring relief he returned to Jericho; (4) at Jericho, knowing that death was near and being well aware that most of the Jewish people hated him, he sent officers into all areas of his kingdom to bring prominent Jewish elders to Jericho where he had them shut up in the hippodrome with instructions that upon his demise they be executed; (5) receiving a letter from Augustus allowing him to either exile or execute his son Antipater \an-tip'-at-ar\, Herod sent his bodyguards to do the latter; (6) he then altered his will and designated Archelaus \är-ka-lä'-as\ to have Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Antipas to be tetrarch of Galilee and Perea \pē-rē'-a\; and Philip to be tetrarch of Gaulanitis \gol-än-ī'-tis\ and related regions; and (7) on the fifth day after having Antipater killed, he died. It is plain that it would have been difficult for all this to transpire within the twenty-nine days between the eclipse of March 12/13 and the Passover of April 11 in the year 4 B.C. The seven months in 5 B.C. would of course be more than sufficient, but that date is not otherwise strongly supported. In 1 B.C. the time would be adequate and not excessive, and this fact is an additional reason for preferring the 1 B.C. date for the death of Herod the Great.<sup>4</sup> (p. 300)

This adjustment in the timing of Herod's death enables us to go to the skies in 3 and 2 B.C. and examine the activity of the planets in the two constellations of Leo and Virgo. When we do this we will discover the keys to identifying the Star of Bethlehem.

Our study will reveal that the star is just the first chapter in a celestial drama played out in the skies. By means of signs silently broadcast by the stars and planets, the discerning Magi were able to perceive not only the birth of the Messiah but Mary's pregnancy and also the script for the resolution of the angelic conflict. For the details, we consult our fifth and final writer:

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<sup>4</sup> Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 298–300.

<sup>5</sup> Fredrick A. Larson, "Bio," <http://www.bethlehemstar.net/bio.htm>.

His research into the identity of the star of Bethlehem led him to the resources we have consulted and the discovery of events that not only reveal Mary's virgin pregnancy and the virgin birth of Messiah but also His crucifixion. The testimony of the entire Carousel tells the story of the Lord's ultimate victory over Lucifer and the establishment of His millennial kingdom. Our emphasis will remain centered on the events related to the Star of Bethlehem.