

## The Magi - Matthew 12:1-12 – Part 1

Please Open Your Bibles To Matthew 2:1-12

For the next three weeks we are going delve into this enigmatic story that is full of much myth and folklore. We are going to cut through the fairytales and colorful assumptions and find the truth from what the scriptures tell us. Throughout history we have turned this account into nothing more than what most of us know it to be...just another Christmas tale reserved for Christmas cards and cartoons. Just a part of our nativity that we put out every year and pack away in a box until next year. But if we take a serious look at this with a biblical lens, we will find it rich of meaning and purpose that will bless us. I have broken this study into three parts.

The Magi:

Where are they from?

What do they do?

What do they bring?

Our first question arises from the first 2 verses:

Matthew 2:1-2

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.”

The word translated “Wise men” is the Greek word:

Wise Men:

μάγος *mágos* - #3097

A Magus – Root word for Magician

Strong's Definition: Oriental scientist;

by implication, a magician:—sorcerer, wise man.

I know what you are thinking, a what? It's not the same as we think of today and before we get into what it is, let us remind ourselves who they are not.

They are not three kings, and we do not know their names. \* I hate to ruin you Nativity scenes, but the night Jesus was born it would not have looked like this. And secondly you might have seen them portrayed like this \* Or as this picture which is from the 6<sup>th</sup> century \* This came about in the beginning of the Byzantine Era around the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century. In about the 8th century the names of three Magi—Bithisarea, Melichior, and

Gathaspa—appear in a chronicle known as the Excerpta latina barbari. They have become known most commonly as Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar (or Casper). According to Western church tradition, Balthasar is often represented as a king of Arabia or sometimes Ethiopia, Melchior as a king of Persia, and Gaspar as a king of India. (Jan 6 – Epiphany – Three Kings Day – 12 days after Christmas) How did this come about? Well, what happened in the 4<sup>th</sup> century? Augustine happened. This is when the idea of a literal Millennial Kingdom was replaced with an allegorical one and the promises in the Bible meant towards them were given to the church and already fully fulfilled in Christ. They took this verse...

#### Psalm 72:10-11

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.

They came to believe this verse was fulfilled then and not the future kingdom where Christ will reign literally from Jerusalem and the nations will come to worship Him there. See how they just make stuff up when you start to take the Bible allegorically? Have you seen what has happened to Kirk Cameron since he joined the Anti Pre-Trib Camp? He is now questioning the eternity of Hell and believing in the false

doctrine called “Annihilism”. This says that after the Great White Throne Judgement the judged are destroyed and no longer exist to suffer forever. This is taught by cults like the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists. If you decide to go down the allegorical route you will make the Bible say whatever you want it to say.

Also, these Magi are not “Zoroastrians”. People think that because they see His star in the east and the Greek word for star or planet is “Aster” and try to put two and two together. We will talk more about the star next week as this week we will deal with who they are.

Well, who are they? First thing we want to know is that at the time of Jesus’ Birth there was no Babylon or Persia empires at that time. By this time what was left of the Seleucid empire that was not conquered by the Romans became the Parthian Empire.

History has much to say and believe it or not the earliest mention we have denotes them as a tribe in the kingdom of the Medes.

Herodotus, \* 5th century BC:

“Deioces, then, united the Median nation by itself and ruled it. The Median tribes are these: the Busae, the Paretaceni, the

Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, the Magi. Their tribes are this many.”

In the Behistun \* Inscription, King Darius, claims that a man from the Magi tribe named Guamata pretended to be Smerdis, the brother of King Cambyses and took the throne.

If that is the case, we just went past the time of the Babylonians and into the reign of the Medes and the Persians.

We \* also find during that time that they were actually priests: Xenophon notes that Cyrus the Great would use these magi to offer sacrifices to the gods before his battles: “But though they had got to the camp, the pickets, acting on the orders of Cyrus, would not let them in till dawn. With the first faint gleam of morning Cyrus summoned the Persian Priests, who are called Magians, and bade them choose the offerings due to the gods for the blessings they had vouchsafed.”

These all bring us to the time in the Bible that is recorded by Daniel the Prophet, and we have a reference to them there that we will take the time to look at today. We need to hold lightly to secular history and greatly on the Biblical text because that is where our answers are found.

Back to our scripture:

Matthew 2:1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men (Magoi – Magos in the plural) 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.”

In the New Testament this word is only used for these wise men and in the book of Acts for two different Sorcerers...

Acts 13:6-8

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer (Magos), a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (Magos) (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

We also have a similar word used for this character:

Acts 8:9-10

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery (Mageuo) in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”

Remember that church tradition gave him the name “Simon Magus” and called him the one who started “Simony”, the act of purchasing your indulgences or pardon from sins

I know what you are thinking, “How could someone like that be seeking Jesus?” Remember context is king and a name for one does not always mean the name of another. Matthew is giving us a clue and that comes from the Old Testament he would have read and been familiar with called the Septuagint. This was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by 70 Jewish Scholars. At the time Matthew wrote his gospel it would have been the same text used by the first century believers as everyone understood Greek. This means that when they heard the word “Magoi” they would have been thinking of Daniel. We know that Matthew expected his readers to know Daniel as Jesus did in Matthew 24...

Matthew 24:15

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand)

If the Bible is our final authority, then we as readers need to understand. When we do, we will find these Magi as being one of the groups introduced in Daniel and then becoming under his command:

Daniel 1:20

And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians (Magi) and astrologers who were in all his realm.

You remember, Daniel would not defile himself the king’s meat and the servant went ahead and tested him and found them better than all the rest. After that they were brought before the king this was said about them. But this leads to the first test:

Daniel 2:27

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, “The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men (Magi), the astrologers, the magicians (Different word used), and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king.”



But notice what the test was, how to interpret dreams. Never in Daniel do we see astrology or astronomy used in prophecy and there is reason for that. Again, we will talk about that next week. But these wise men are always first in the list when the king's needed interpretation of dreams. So, this is who these Magi were. And we also learn that Daniel was the one who was over them.

### Daniel 5:11

There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians (Magi), astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.

So, we find that these Magi were a tribe of the Medes that became priests that served kings. They were still around after Babylon and served in the Persian court and were still around during the Parthian empire. These ancestors of those that we read about in Daniel would have had the book of Daniel to guide them. What was it that they knew? In the first dream of prophecy in Daniel is Nebuchadnezzar's which starts the Aramaic section of Daniel that was the language of the Magi.

They would have heard the interpretation and would be able to read...

#### Daniel 2:44-45

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

They would have been there under Daniel when he would have his dream in chapter 7 and as dream interpreters would have passed down its importance from generation to generation.

#### Daniel 7:14

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

They would have been good at connecting dots as they were trained by Daniel. But how did they know to go to Jerusalem when they saw the star and knew the time had come? After all they saw the star, but it did not lead them until after they got there. As Daniel continued to be a leader in the court of Cyrus and Darius, both mentioned in history to have a relationship with the Magi, they would have had knowledge of Daniel's vision at the end of the 70 years.

### Daniel 9:1-2

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

And this led to his prayer that led to the prophecy that the Magi would have known...

### Daniel 9:24

“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting

righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy...”

Daniel 9:25

“...Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times...”

Daniel 9:26

“...And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined...”

And verse 27 we all know is referring to the 70<sup>th</sup> week yet to come. But very interesting is the fact that they would have known that 483 Babylonian years from the decree by Cyrus would have been the about the time they saw the star and would have known that the time had come. We will dive into more next week but just from the scriptures we find these Magi believed in the prophecies of Daniel and believed they would be fulfilled literally. Not only that but this was passed down for

over 400 years by those that were trained by Daniel. What is the point that Matthew is making by introducing these Magi in this way?

Matthew 2:1-2

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.”**

On limited information passed down from century to century they believed and acted on it. Matthew is the Jewish Apostle writing to present Jesus as the Messiah to Jewish people. He is showing that even the Gentiles were expecting Him to come but Israel rejected Him. What about you? You have much more information than they had and at what lengths are you willing to go to worship Him? Just a thought but remember wise men still seek Him!

John 1:11-13

He came to His own (The Jewish Nation), and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him (The Magi!), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who

believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.