Air*

1Thessalonians 4:14-17 (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.
(15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.
(16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
(17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to **meet the Lord in the air**: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.
As we make our way through this pilgrimage called "life," surely we would count among the strongest aspirations of the human heart, the desire to be content and happy—not in the mediocre sense of those words, but instead to be genuinely fulfilled and at peace both with ourselves and with the world in general. Oh, how we would like to be able to say with the writer of old and actually mean it: This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24). *But, as each of us knows all too well from personal experience, not every day causes us to "rejoice and be glad." The simple truth is that things do not always go our way. Plans go awry. Fortunes are forfeited. Friendships are broken. Lives are lost. To echo the words of that ancient patriarch so famous for his perseverance in the face of adversity,* "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). *Facing the routine vicissitudes of life would be difficult enough on its own, without any outside force "stacking the deck." Unfortunately, there is an outside force marshaled against us. Within the pages of Holy Writ, that "outside force" is identified by a variety of designations, but likely the best known and most widely used among them is the name: Satan.*

Various New Testament writers referred to Satan as the originator of;
*(**Sin**)* He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).
(Oppression) How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts10:38).
(Death) Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (Hebrews 2:14).
Satan had the "power of death," not as lord, but simply as executioner. It must be remembered that death entered in because of satan's deceit. In any study of Satan, the question is bound to arise: Why has Satan established himself as God's arch-enemy and man's ardent foe? No doubt a portion of the answer can be found that he, too, once inhabited the heavenly realm, but as a result of his defiant rebellion against the great "I AM," he was cast down. Satan's insurrection failed miserably, and that failure had dire, eternal consequences. His obstinate attempt to usurp God's authority cost him his position among the heavenly host and doomed him forever to "everlasting bonds under darkness. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Rev 12:9). *In the end, his sedition gained him nothing and cost him everything. Regardless of the battle plan he adopted to challenge the Creator of the Universe, regardless of the battlefield he chose, and regardless of the strength or numbers of his army, the simple fact of the matter is; that in the most important contest of his existence—**He lost!** The conditions of his*

ultimate surrender were harsh. Although his armies had been thoroughly routed, although he had been completely vanquished, and although the Victor had imposed the worst kind of permanent exile, satan was determined not to go quietly into the night. While he had lost the war, he nevertheless planned future skirmishes. He was vindictive by nature (Revelation 12:12), in possession of cunning devices (2 Corinthians 2:11), and determined to be "the deceiver of the whole world" (Revelation 12:9), he set his face against all that is righteous and holy—and never once looked back. His anger at having been defeated fueled his determination to strike back in revenge. But strike back at whom? It was futile to attempt a second mutiny. God's power was too great, and His omnipotence too all-consuming (Job 42:2; 1 John 4:4). Another target was needed; another repository of satanic revenge would have to be found. And who better to serve as the recipient of hell's unrighteous indignation than mankind—the only creature in the Universe made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Satan cannot attack God directly, so he employs various methods to attack man, God's master creation. Sweet revenge—despoiling the "apple of God's eye" (Zechariah 2:8) and the zenith of His creativity! Thus, with the creation of man, the battle was on—and has been ever since. Satan is out to get us. It is a fight to the finish! Turn with me to;

Ephesians 2:1-3 (1) And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
(2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, **according to the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
(3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Air is something that surrounds us, we are completely

immersed in it. We cannot get away from it. That's the way it is with Satan's influence in the world around us. Everywhere you look, you see the corruption that is a direct result of Satan's influence. The Apostle once taught;
But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:
In whom the **god of this world** hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (2Corinthians 4:3-4).
How is Satan "god of this world"? The phrase "god of this world" indicates that Satan is the major influence on the mind-set expressed by the ideals, opinions, goals, hopes and views of the majority of people. His areas of influence also encompass the world's philosophies, education, politics and commerce. The perverse thoughts, ideas, speculations and false religions of the world are under his control and have sprung from satans lies and broad based deceptions. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1John 2:16). *There are no little events in life, those we think as having no consequence may be full of deceit, it is at our own risk if we neglect gospel opportunities that are offered;* How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; (Hebrews 2:3).
Satan is called the "prince of the power of the air" in Ephesians 2:2. He is called the "ruler of this world" in John 12:31. He is called the "god of this world" in 2Corinthians 4:4. These titles, and many more attributed to Satan throughout Scripture, signify his capabilities. To say, for example, that Satan is the "prince of the power of the air" is to signify that in some way he rules over the world and the people in it. However, believers are not under the rule of Satan, but of God; Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (Col 1:13).

The "power of darkness" is the domain of satan that believers have been delivered from. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are caught "in the condemnation of the devil." Jesus said; He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18). *So, when the Bible says that Satan is the "god of this world," it is not saying that he has ultimate authority. It is conveying the idea that Satan rules over the unbelieving world in a specific way. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, the unbeliever follows Satan's agenda because the "god of this world" has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel in Christ. Satan's agenda includes pushing a false philosophy onto an unbelieving world—a false philosophy that blinds the unbeliever from the truth of the Gospel. Satan's philosophies are the fortresses in which people are imprisoned. But Christ offers a way of escape;*

1Peter 3:18-21 (18) For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:
(19) By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
(20) Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, **eight souls were saved by water**.
(21) The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Before Christ assended up into heaven he left these instructions; He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16). *A popular broad based philosophy is, "baptism is not necessary to receive salvation." This is a false philosophy blinding the*

minds of the unbeliever. Be aware, satan is deceitful and a master of desception, we have been warned by Paul the Apostle; And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2Corinthians 11:14-15).
However Christians should; Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).
We can face the Evil One with full confidence that the victory is already won by the blood of Christ. The only ones who need their back protected are the ones God will not protect -- those who do not trust in Christ and His word of salvation. Behold, mainstream religion teaches "baptism is not necessary," and no wonder, Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Listen, the Devil is never more dangerous than when he masquerades. When Satan gets into the pulpit, or the theological chair and pretends to teach religion when in reality he is corrupting it; pretends to be teaching religious evidences when in reality he is undermining the very foundations of faith; pretends to be teaching religious introduction, when in reality he is making the Bible out as a book that is not worthy of being introduced -- then look out for him; he is at his most dangerous work. Happy is the man in these days who is not ignorant of the devices of the devil, and realizes that he frequently masquerades as an angel of light.
There are two completely opposing forces; good verses evil, truth verses lies, righteousness verses deceitfulness. Everything that God said would happen, has happened—just as He said it would. Since God knows all things past, present, and future (and since He is completely honest), it is impossible for Him to speak untruths. One striking characteristic of the Bible is that it contains a large collection of statements attributed to God himself. Some of these statements are

predictions of future occurrences, some are warnings, some are instructions, some are revelations concerning the Divine character, and some are statements of simple fact. One common thread runs through all of God's recorded statements: they are all true. God has never "gone back" on a promise. God has never lied—He has never even made an "honest mistake." And; According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: (2Peter 1:3). *God, in revealing His message to humans has not held back truths that we need. While the dishonesty of Satan is one of the features that makes him the complete opposite of God; God speaks the truth exclusively, while Satan speaks only lies. The angels who at one time chose to follow Satan are partakers in his deceit. Satan does not tell lies because he wants humans to avoid the pain that truth often brings. Rather, he lies because he hopes that humans will believe falsehoods, and eventually, be damned because they reject the truth of God. Listen, Christians should;*
Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (1Pet 5:8). *There is not one single item in Christianity upon which our souls' salvation depends that is only 'probably' true. The Biblical evidence supplied is sufficient to establish conclusive proof regarding the salvation of the Christian faith. Turn with me to;*
Hebrews 11:1-5 (1) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence of things not seen**.
(2) For by it the elders obtained a good report.
(3) Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.
(4) By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet

speaketh.
(5) By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.
The Bible is unique among all books. Not only is it different in its form, structure, and history, but it takes the position of supernatural superiority to all other communication. It insists on total accuracy for its content and absolute obedience to its commands. No other book is so demanding nor offers so much. The Bible has proven to be historically accurate. It has been subjected to the minutest scientific textual analysis possible to humanity and has been proven to be authentic in every way. The most controversial book of the Bible is Genesis, especially the first eleven chapters. Those chapters speak of the creation of the universe, the fall of man into sin, the world-wide flood of Noah, and the language-altering event at Babel. There is much evidence that these events are historically accurate. The Bible is not a science textbook, but it does deal with scientifically relevant issues. Although much controversy surrounds the early chapters of Genesis, empirical science which is observable, testable and repeatable, verifies the Bible's information. The only science that pretends to prove the Bible inaccurate is "science falsely so called." The information available concerning the 40 authors of the Biblical text clearly demonstrates both their historicity and their credibility. Many of these writers were well known in secular history, and many suffered cruel treatment, even death, for their stand on their witness. To the obvious credibility of their writings is added the unshakable belief that their testimony was so true that it was worth suffering and dying for. Listen, Christ said; If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you (John 15:18).
Considering the great signs and wonders that occurred during the birth of Christ it seems astounding that any could reject

Him. Mary and Joseph had traveled from their home in Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, in order to be counted in the Roman census at Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph's family. While there in Bethlehem, the child Jesus was born according to scripture; But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2). *His birth is recorded in;*

Luke 2:4-9 (4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

(5) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

(6) And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

(7) And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

(8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

(9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Although announced both by the heavenly host in the air above Bethlehem and also by the new star, neither announcement seemed to make any particular stir in Jerusalem. Al-tho King Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled at the sayings of the wise men, yet they were sent to Bethlehem without an escort. The shepherds had spread the news around Bethlehem, and later Simeon and Anna around Jerusalem (Luke 2:17,38), but only a few realized the real significance of the event. The Jews apparently had little interest in Balaam's prophecy of the star. Possibly because he was a Gentile who had been slain by

the Israelites at the time of Moses. Here are his words; I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth (Numbers 24:17). *Could that star the wise men followed have been a supernatural sign indicating the remarkable prediction*
for the great King to be born? Did the Persian Magi only, see the star? None of the political or religious leaders of the Jews seemed aware of it until these men from a distant country suddenly showed up in Jerusalem proclaiming a new born King.
When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.
And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet (Matthew 2:3-5),
Thus Messiah was announced to the world as no other child before or after. And His message like no other. Because of the peerless value of His death, God is offering to all the blessings of salvation on a grace basis. It begins with belief. Faith in Christ is the effect of belief, and baptism is the effect of that faith; only those who first believe the testimony of God, repent of their sins, confess Jesus is the Son of God, and are baptized for remission of sins, have the full and explicit testimony of pardon. This is the gospel. If any need prayer for other reasons in either case come while we persuade with song.

This message approved by
Jack Warford
a minister for Christ

Was the Star of Bethlehem a Star, Comet ... or Miracle?

by Joe Rao, SPACE.com Skywatching Columnist | December 23, 2011 07:00am ET

As a young boy, one of my highlights of the Christmas season was visiting New York's Hayden Planetarium where they would stage their traditional sky show in which astronomers pondered the age-old question of the possible origin of the Star of Bethlehem.

Between 1935 and 1959, Hayden's very first Zeiss projector (three others have been installed since) was run back some 2,000 years in an attempt to reproduce the positions of the planets around the time of the birth of Christ. The entire procedure would take four hours with the planets engaged in an incredible fast-moving dance while the moon flipped around the sky a hundred times a minute!

Ultimately, the projector was brought to a halt on Feb. 25 in the year 6 BC with the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars forming a triangle low in the western sky.

In those days, a silhouette of the skyline of New York was a permanent fixture around the periphery of the planetarium dome, so the planet trio was depicted not above a Middle East desert, but Midtown Manhattan. The audience was then asked: "Was the star seen by the Wise Men an unusual, eye-catching gathering of naked eye planets, or was that fabled 'sign in the sky' a meteor, comet, nova, or something supernatural?"

In later years, the tedious running-back of the projector was discontinued, mainly to save needless wear and tear on the machinery. In 1960, special auxiliary projectors were designed to depict the planet triangle. And the panorama silhouette of New York skyscrapers was replaced by a series of projectors which could replicate not just the skyline of New York, but scenes from any location on Earth. As such, Hayden audiences could now watch as Jupiter, Saturn and Mars drew near to each other over the landscape of Bethlehem.

But there are many other contributing factors to this age-old story, including the uncertainty in the actual date of Christ's birth and the terminology used to describe celestial events during the Star's appearance some 20 centuries ago. For instance, any heavenly object bright enough to attract attention was apt to be called a "star." Meteors, for instance, were "shooting" or "falling" stars; comets were "hairy" stars; novas were "new" stars and planets were "wandering" stars. [Space Christmas: Festive Photos of Cosmic Beauty]

Trying to fix a date

The Bible says nothing about the calendar date of the Nativity, but does refer to historical personages and events, such as the reign of King Herod. Modern historical research suggests that Herod may have died sometime between 4 B.C. and 1 B.C. by our present calendar. The Magi are said to have visited Herod just before he died and presumably the birth of Christ and the first appearance of the fabled Star came sometime before that.

And it is very doubtful that Jesus was born in late December.

For one thing, the oft-quoted Biblical passage in St. Luke: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" indicates that spring is the likely season; that was when the shepherds in Judea were tending the newborn lambs.

In ancient times, Dec. 25 was the date of the lavish Roman festival of Saturnalia. It was a time when gifts were exchanged; homes, streets and buildings were decorated; people came home for the holidays and everybody was in a happy, party mood.

It has been said that early Christians chose the date of the Saturnalia in order to avoid attention and thus escape persecution. When the Roman emperor Constantine officially adopted Christianity in the 4th century, the date of Christmas remained Dec. 25.

And Christ's birth almost certainly did not occur 2,011 years ago. Our present chronology by which the years are numbered as AD or BC was conceived by the Roman abbot Dionysius Exiguus around 523 A.D. Unfortunately, Dionysius made two significant errors in his calculations.

The first was his placement of 1 A.D. immediately following 1 B.C., completely disregarding the mathematically required 0 in between. Back then in Europe, zero was not considered a number. So, for instance, the year we now call 3 B.C., is actually –2 numerically speaking.

Second, Dionysius accepted the statement of Clement of Alexandria that Jesus was born in the 28th year of the reign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. But Dionysius failed to realize that during the first four years of his reign this Roman ruler was known by his original name Octavianus, until the Roman senate proclaimed him as "Augustus."

So here alone we have an error of four years, but by the time it was realized our chronology was too well entrenched to be changed.

As for the time for the appearance of the Star, most astronomers and Biblical scholars believe that it most likely occurred sometime between the years 7 and 2 B.C. So this is the time frame that we need to explore to determine if there was anything unusual in the sky that might have caught the attention of the Magi.

What might the star have been?

At least four theories have been advanced to explain the Star of Bethlehem from a purely astronomical viewpoint.

Possibly the first idea put forward was that it was an unusually bright fireball meteor seen streaking toward the horizon. But as any sky watcher knows from experience, such an object can be seen to flash across the sky in a mere matter of seconds – hardly long enough to lead the Magi halfway across the Orient to the little town of Bethlehem. So we can confidently lay this concept to rest.

Not so easily dismissed, however, is the possibility that the Star was a bright comet. Such objects can remain visible to the unaided eye for weeks either in the predawn sky or at dusk. Surely it is not impossible to conceive that a comet with a bright star-like head and long gossamer tail pointing like some cosmic finger toward the horizon could have drawn the Magi to Bethlehem.

The famous Halley's Comet, last seen in early 1986, flared in the sky during August and September in the year 11 BC. However, most authorities dismiss it due to the poor time fit. Although it seems unlikely that another Great Comet could have appeared nearer to the accepted time frame of the Star's appearance and went unrecorded, we can never really be sure.

Besides, comets were viewed as omens of evil, such as floods and famine as well as the death – not the birth – of kings and monarchs. The Romans, in marking the death of the Roman General Agrippa, for example, used the 11 B.C. apparition of Halley's Comet as a benchmark. With this in mind, comets would seem to be wrong as the heavenly sign that would signal the coming of a newborn king.

Perhaps the simplest answer is a nova or supernova outburst: A new star blazes forth where none had ever been seen and leaves no trace for us to find in the future. Although their names imply a new creation, these spectacular objects are in reality dying stars, although they are new (albeit temporary) additions to the nighttime sky. [Amazing Supernova Photos]

The appearance of a nova is unpredictable – a really bright one becomes visible perhaps once every 20 years or so. Going on this assumption, we're due for a bright naked-eye nova at almost any time now, since the most recent one appeared in August 1975 not far from the bright star Deneb in the constellation Cygnus.

Most bright novas suddenly and unexpectedly flare into prominence literally overnight, attracting the instant attention of sky-conscious people. But after several days or weeks of such prominence, it gradually fades back to obscurity.

Even more spectacular – but much rarer – are supernovae; stars that suddenly blow themselves completely apart, briefly producing an incredible energy output equivalent to the combined light of an entire galaxy of stars!

At the height of its outburst, a supernova can shine with a brilliance capable of casting shadows and can even be seen in broad daylight – truly a celestial announcement worthy of the birth of a king. In our Milky Way galaxy, over the past thousand years, there have been four brilliant supernovas, in 1006, 1054, 1572 and 1604.

Clearly, we are long overdue for another.

Although a nova or supernova is the most satisfying explanation for the Star, there is a serious problem with it, in that there doesn't seem to be any definitive record of a bright nova appearing in the sky during the time that biblical historians believe the Magi made their journey. One nova apparently did appear, bordering the constellations Capricornus and Aquarius during the spring of 5 B.C. But the Chinese records, which describe this object, imply that it was apparently not very conspicuous at all.

Planet peregrinations?

The final possibility is one or more of the bright naked-eye planets. The likelihood that the Magi could have confused one or more of the familiar planets with a star seems remote. However, sometimes two or more of these restless wanderers come together in a striking conjunction.

Perhaps a planetary grouping of particular beauty; an exceptionally close conjunction of two planets or groupings of three or more creating an eye-catching geometric figure in the sky may have taken place between the years 7 and 2 B.C. Such a gathering would be quite unusual to say the least.

One such event that we've already mentioned occurred in 6 B.C. involving Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, and happened in the constellation of Pisces, the Fishes.

Yet another possible explanation for the Star of Bethlehem is the three-times passing of Jupiter and Saturn between May and December in 7 BC; a rare triple or "great conjunction." Jupiter appeared to pass one degree north of Saturn on May 29; practically the same on Sept. 30; then finally a third time on Dec. 5.

There is no doubt about the visibility of these events, mostly opposite to the sun in nighttime skies. As for their astrological impact, the Magi would have certainly noticed that both planets did not appear to separate widely between their conjunctions. In fact, for eight consecutive months – the time it might have taken to travel the 500 miles or more from Babylonia to Judea – Jupiter and Saturn remained within three degrees of each other, from late April of 7 B.C. until early January of 6 B.C.

But perhaps no other planetary grouping can equal that of the two brightest planets – Venus and Jupiter – for the explanation that we seek. And if we take the only known account of the Star given in St. Matthew, then what we really need is the appearance of not just one, but two "stars." The first appearance would have been seen well in advance of the Magi's arrival in Bethlehem, and the other at the end of their long journey.

As the planets slowly descended toward the horizon they got closer and closer together. Finally, at 8:30 p.m. local time they drew to within a mere 0.6 of an arc minute of each other while appearing in the western twilight sky.

To the Magi the two brightest planets must have appeared to coalesce into one and glowed before them like a dazzling beacon over Judea. Eyeglasses were many centuries in the future, so only people with perfect

eyes would have seen the planets separated.

Astronomy can tell us that all these planetary conjunctions indeed occurred. But whether anyone actually observed them, and if any of these sent the Magi on their historic journey, are all matters for conjecture.

A supernatural occurrence?

And finally, was the Star of Bethlehem a miracle star?

Hubert J. Bernhard, who for many years was a lecturer at San Francisco's Morrison Planetarium made a series of four LP record albums in 1967, trying to educate and popularize astronomy. They were called "The Planetarium Lecture Series" and one of his topics dealt with the Star of Bethlehem. Near the end of his lecture Bernhard placed this discussion into perspective when he said:

"If you accept the story told in the Bible as the literal truth, then the Christmas Star could not have been a natural apparition. Its movement in the sky and its ability to stand above and mark a single building; these would indicate that it was not a normal phenomenon, but a supernatural sign. One given from on high and one that science will never be able to explain."

Indeed, perhaps this is a mystery that modern science can never truly unravel. Astronomy has taken us as far as it can go. The final decision is yours, alone.

Joe Rao serves as an instructor and guest lecturer at New York's Hayden Planetarium. He writes about astronomy for The New York Times and other publications, and he is also an on-camera meteorologist for News 12 Westchester, New York.

Satan--His Origin And Mission [Part I]

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

As we make our way through this pilgrimage called "life," surely we would count among the strongest aspirations of the human heart the desire to be content and happy—not in the mediocre sense of those words, but instead to be genuinely fulfilled and at peace both with ourselves and with the world in general. Oh, how we would like to be able to say with the writer of old (and actually mean it): "This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

But, as each of us knows all too well from personal experience, not every day causes us to "rejoice and be glad." The simple truth is that things do not always go our way. Plans go awry. Fortunes are forfeited. Friendships are broken. Lives are lost. To echo the words of that ancient patriarch so famous for his perseverance in the face of adversity, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).

Facing the routine vicissitudes of life would be difficult enough on its own, without any outside force "stacking the deck." Unfortunately, however, there **is** an outside force marshaled against us. Within the pages of Holy Writ, that "outside force" is identified by a variety of designations, but likely the best known and most widely used among them is the name: **Satan**.

In the Old Testament (where we first are introduced to the word, and where it is used approximately nineteen times), etymologically the Hebrew term *satan* is related to an Aramaic verb that means "to lie in wait," "to oppose," or "to set oneself in opposition to." On occasion the term was employed to describe in non-specific terms any adversary, but whenever it was accompanied by the definite article (i.e., **the** adversary), it always indicated a proper name associated with mankind's greatest adversary, Satan (Hiebert, 1975, 5:282).

In the New Testament (where the term Satan is used thirty-six times), the Greek word for Satan (*satanas*) indicates an adversary, opponent, or enemy, and "is always used of 'Satan,' the adversary..." (Vine, et al., 1985, p. 547). Another designation for our Great Adversary—"devil"—is used thirty-three times in the New Testament, and "...came into English through the German language from the Greek word *diabolos*. *Diabolos* means a slanderer, treacherous informer and, traitor" (Overton, 1976, 5[4]:3).

Exactly who is this devil, Satan, who has established himself as God's archfiend and mankind's ardent foe? Is he real? If he is, what is his origin? Why has he arrayed himself against both God and man? What is his mission? What are his powers? And what is his ultimate destiny? These are questions that cry out from the human heart for answers. Fortunately, God's Word provides those answers.

IS SATAN REAL?

Throughout history, both those who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God (unbelievers), and those who accept it but only marginally so (religious liberals), have disavowed the existence of Satan as a real, personal, spiritual being. Rather, they speak of him as a "myth," and of his dealings with mankind as "legends" invented as vehicles of "moral teaching" intended to impart great spiritual truths. But neither he nor his activities is accepted as historical reality. For example, atheistic writer Isaac Asimov, who was serving as president of the American Humanist Association at the time of his death in 1992, wrote:

By New Testament times, the Jews had developed, in full detail, the **legend** that Satan had been the leader of the "fallen angels." These were angels who rebelled against God by refusing to bow down before Adam when that first man was created, using as their argument that they were made of light and man only of clay. Satan, the leader of the rebels, thought, in his pride, to supplant God. The rebelling angels were, however, hurled out of heaven and into Hell. By the time this legend was developed the Jews had come under Greek influence and they may have perhaps been swayed by Greek myths concerning the attempts of the Titans, and later the Giants, to defeat Zeus and assume mastery of the universe. Both Titans and Giants were defeated and imprisoned underground. But whether Greek-inspired or not, the **legend** came to be firmly fixed in Jewish consciousness (1968, p. 540, emp. added; see also pp. 408-410).

The assessment of liberal-leaning religious writers does not sound much different. Andrew Zenos of Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Chicago suggested:

The apparent incongruity of a person (i.e., Satan) with such a frame of mind consorting with the other "sons of God" in the courts of heaven, giving an account of himself to, and speaking on familiar terms with, God, disappears when the narrative is seen to be constructed, not as a picture of realities, but as a vehicle of moral teaching... (1936, p. 811).

Almost half-a-century later, two writers, Neal D. Buffaloe and N. Patrick Murray, co-authored a text in which they wrote: "By contrast [to the literal, historical view of Genesis—BT], the mainstream of Biblical scholarship rejects the literal historicity of the Genesis stories prior to Chapter 12, and finds the literature of parable and symbol in the early chapters of Genesis." Later, in referring to the events of these chapters, including Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, the authors stated that "these things never were..." (1981, pp. 5,8).

Because unbelievers reject belief in the spirit entity known as God (and, not coincidentally, the Bible as His Word), it hardly is shocking that they simultaneously repudiate belief in the spirit being known as Satan (whose actual existence can be documented only within God's Word). Skepticism of, and opposition to, spiritual matters on the part of unbelievers should be expected. Skepticism of, and opposition to, such matters on the part of those professing to be believers should not.

The same Bible that informs the religious liberal about the existence of the God in Whom he proclaims **to believe**, also informs him of the existence of Satan—in whom he does **not believe**. Where is the consistency? Furthermore, consider the emphasis on Satan within the whole of the Sacred Text, the importance placed on the fact of his existence by both biblical writers and the Son of God Himself, and the critical role he has played in the necessity of God's great plan of salvation for mankind.

The Reality of Satan in the Old Testament

From the first book of the Bible (Genesis) to the last (Revelation), the existence of the devil as a real, literal adversary is affirmed. Our first introduction to Satan occurs in Genesis 3 as he arrives in the form of a serpent to tempt Eve. Speaking of the historical nature of this account, M.W. Jacobus observed:

That there was a real serpent in this transaction cannot be doubted any more than we can doubt the real history throughout. Here, where the facts speak, further explanations are not necessary, nor fitted to the time of the beginning. (1) The real serpent is contrasted with the other animals, (vs. 1). (2) In the New Testament allusion is made to a real serpent in referring to the history (2 Cor. 11:3,14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 20:2). Yet (3) that there was in the transaction a superior agent, Satan himself, who made use of the serpent, is plain from his being referred to as "the old Serpent, called the Devil and Satan," (Rev. 12:9)—"a murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44) (1864, 1:112).

Additional Old Testament testimony addresses the historical existence of Satan. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, the text states: “And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.” Six verses later, this simple statement is found: “And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel” (1 Chronicles 21:7). Israel suffered as a direct result of Satan’s workings in the life of her monarch.

In the book of Job, Satan retains a place of great prominence—more, perhaps, than in any other Bible book. In the first two chapters alone, he is mentioned at least fourteen times. In fact, Job 2:1-2 records a conversation between this mendacious despot and God:

> Again it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, that Satan came also among them to present himself before Jehovah. And Jehovah said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered Jehovah, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

The entire theological thrust of the book of Job is utterly dependent upon the actual existence of Satan, his adversarial nature toward God and mankind, and Heaven’s ultimate superiority over him. Further, the New Testament epistle of James boldly refers to Job’s dealings with Satan: “Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful” (5:11). What possible meaning could this have had to first-century saints who were about to endure extreme persecution and intense suffering as a result of their faith? An imaginary fight between a non-existent devil and a mythical patriarch could not, and would not, provide much comfort to those whose lives were in imminent danger. A promise that “the Lord is full of pity, and merciful”—based on real, historical events—could, would, and did provide such comfort in times of peril.

In Zechariah 3:1-10, the prophet recorded a vision “...intended to show that Jehovah’s people, conditioned upon a moral and spiritual reformation, could again enjoy prosperity” (Jackson, 1980, p. 75). In Zechariah’s vision, Satan appeared as an adversary of Joshua the high priest, who was clothed with dirty garments that symbolized “the sins of the whole nation, of which he was the representative” (Hengstenberg, n.d., p. 972).

> And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. And Jehovah said unto Satan, “Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” (3:1-2).

In describing the spiritual importance of this scene, one writer commented: “Satan was ready to challenge the Lord’s own institution for the forgiveness of sin, to deny the right of God to pardon the sinner. He seeks to overthrow the Throne of Grace, so hateful to him, and to turn it into a seat of judgment and condemnation” (Laetsch, 1956, p. 422; cf. also Psalm 109:3-8). Satan’s part in this scenario hardly can be overstated. Without his act of overt condemnation, and God’s response to it, Zechariah’s message to the people of God would be lost. The activity and historical reality of Satan in the Old Covenant sets the stage for the urgency of God’s plan of salvation in the New.

The Reality of Satan in the New Testament

Within the pages of the New Testament, the existence of Satan is reaffirmed, and more of his cunning, deceit, and hypocrisy is revealed. Of paramount importance is the record of his temptation of the Son of God (Matthew 4:1-11; cf. Luke 4:1-13). Erich Sauer has noted:

> The whole story of the temptation of Jesus proves beyond all doubt that we are here concerned with a factual and personal conflict between two protagonists. The accounts of the evangelists and the behaviour

and words of Jesus show clearly that we are not here concerned with a mere "principle" of evil, but with a real, factually present, speaking and active person, not "the evil" but "the evil one" (1962, p. 64).

A few chapters later, we find Jesus referring to Satan as "Beelzebub" (Matthew 12:27), a term that originally meant "lord of refuse," "lord of the flies," or "lord of dung" (Easton, 1996). As such, it was an expression of extreme contempt that signified all that was the opposite of holiness and purity—hardly a name to be applied by the Lord to some harmless, legendary, mythical character of antiquity. Wayne Jackson has suggested:

As the serpent seduced Eve (Gen. 3:6) through the manifold channels of the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the vainglory of life (I John 2:16), so he sought to solicit Christ to sin similarly (Matt. 4:1-11). Interestingly, he is denominated "the tempter" in that narrative. The Greek term is *peirazon*, a present tense participle—literally expanded, "the always tempting one"—which suggests his characteristic activity. Had the devil succeeded in causing Christ to sin, the Lord could not have served as the blemishless sin-offering (I Peter 1:19; II Cor. 5:21), and the entire human race would have been forever lost! (1980, p. 76).

Christ's apostles also addressed the fact of Satan's existence. And certainly they knew of which they spoke, for Satan is depicted within the pages of the New Testament as their ardent enemy. For example, the Lord informed Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). A fact often overlooked within this text is that the pronoun "you" in the Greek is plural, indicating that Satan wanted **all** of the apostles (see Jackson, 1980, p. 76). The apostle Paul spoke of "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) who has his "devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11), and even "ministers" who disguise themselves as righteous (2 Corinthians 11:15). The apostle John noted that "the devil sinneth from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), and lamented the fact that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Further, Paul's thorn in the flesh was said to have been "a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). But perhaps most sinister is the fact that it was Satan who "put into the heart of Judas Iscariot" the idea to betray his Lord (John 13:2).

In addition, various New Testament writers referred to Satan as the author of sin (1 John 3:8), sickness (Acts 10:38), and death (Hebrews 2:14), and the one who leads men astray (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The authors of *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* make an important observation when they state that:

"Satan" is not simply the personification of evil influences in the heart, for he tempted Christ, in whose heart no evil thought could ever have arisen (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15); moreover his personality is asserted in both the OT and NT, and especially in the latter, whereas if the OT language was intended to be figurative, the NT would have made this evident (1985, p. 547).

What the New Testament makes evident, however, is exactly the opposite—i.e., that Satan is **not** figurative, but very real.

SATAN'S ORIGIN

The Bible does not address specifically the origin of Satan, yet there is adequate information to draw a logical, well-reasoned conclusion as to how he came into existence. Consider the following.

Is Satan Deity?

Although quite powerful, Satan does not enjoy the status of deity. Clues to this fact are scattered throughout

the pages of Holy Writ. Deity is **eternal**. Scripture speaks of "the eternal God" (Deuteronomy 33:27) Whose "years shall have no end" (Psalm 102:27), and Who is "the Alpha and the Omega..., who is and who was and who is to come" (Revelation 1:8). Deity is **omnipotent**. He is referred to as "God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1) Who cannot "be restrained" (Job 42:2). By "the thunder of his power" (Job 26:13-14) He has the might to create (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:12) or destroy (2 Peter 3:10). He alone retains the power to instill life (Genesis 2:7), and to raise the dead (Ephesians 1:20). Deity is **omnipresent**. "[T]here is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). He is "at hand" and "afar off " (Jeremiah 23:23-24). He is able to "bring every work into judgment...every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Deity is **omniscient**. The psalmist wrote:

> O Jehovah, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Jehovah, thou knowest it altogether.... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it (139:1-6).

God not only knows the past and the present, but the future as well (Acts 15:18). Indeed, "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out" (Romans 11:33).

Satan, by comparison, does not possess these qualities. For example, he is not omnipotent. Scripture affirms: "greater is he [God] that is in you than he [Satan] that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). When he sought to "sift" the apostles as wheat, he first had to "ask" for them (Luke 22:31). Satan is not omnipresent. His position as "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) was "delivered" unto him (Luke 4:6). When he eventually is cast permanently into his place of eternal torment, the devil will be powerless to resist (Revelation 20:10). In discussing the apocalyptic literature of the book of Revelation which speaks of Satan's being "bound" (20:2), Hardeman Nichols observed: "The binding of Satan, we conclude, equally means that his work will be restrained in a certain realm..." (1978, p. 262). Omnipresence, by definition, is not restrained. Further, Satan is not omniscient. If we are sufficiently knowledgeable of the Word of God, and carefully wield that knowledge to resist him, the devil does not possess a superior knowledge sufficient to overcome us, but will "flee" (James 4:17; cf. Matthew 4:4). He is not intelligent enough to outwit us in order to "snatch" us from the Lord's hand (John 10:28).

The only possible conclusion regarding Satan is that he is not deity. But such a conclusion has serious implications. If Satan does not partake of the nature of deity, then he cannot be eternal. Thus, he must be a **created being**. That, as Wayne Jackson has explained, is exactly what he is.

> ...[S]ince the devil is not of the nature of deity, it is obvious that he is a created being, for **all** things and beings (outside the class of deity) are the result of creation—"for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" (Col. 1:16); this would include Satan as he originally was (1980, p. 78; emp. in orig.).

Was Satan Created "Evil"?

But what was Satan originally? When was he created? And was he created "evil"? The biblical evidence may be summarized as follows. The Scriptures categorically state that all things, as they had been created originally, were good. Genesis 1:31 records: "And God saw **everything** that he had made, and, behold, it was **very good** (emp. added). In their Old Testament commentary on the Pentateuch, Keil and Delitzsch

have observed:

By the application of the term "good" to everything that God made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis "very" at the close of the whole creation, the existence of anything evil in the creation of God is absolutely denied, and the hypothesis entirely refuted, that the six days' work merely subdued and fettered an ungodly, evil principle, which had already forced its way into it (1968, 1:67).

Thus, whatever else Satan may have been originally, he was **good**. God did not **create** Satan as an evil adversary; rather, Satan **became** evil. Some, however, have suggested that God's statement in Isaiah 45:7—"I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and **create evil**. I am Jehovah, that doeth all these things"—indicates that God does, in fact, create things that are evil. This view results from a misunderstanding of the use of the word "evil" within the context of that passage. The statement obviously can have no reference to moral evil, since such is contrary to God's holy nature (see Isaiah 6:3). Deuteronomy 32:4 describes Jehovah as the "God of faithfulness and without iniquity." An in-depth examination of the passage in Isaiah reveals that God, through the prophet, was announcing to the (as yet unborn) Cyrus, king of Persia, his intention to use the monarch as an instrument for punishment. Notice in Isaiah 45:7 how the word "evil" is employed in direct contrast to "peace." God's point was this: "I form light and create darkness [viz., I control nature]; I make peace and create evil [viz., I also control nations]; I am Jehovah that doeth all these things."

Later in the forty-seventh chapter, there is a commentary that further explains how the word "evil" is used in chapter 45, verse seven. In verse 11, as he described the coming judgment upon Babylon, Isaiah said: "Therefore shall **evil** come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou knowest not" (emp. added). The "evil" that God "created" was **desolation** due to the abject wickedness of the Babylonian empire. In Isaiah 31:1-2, God similarly warned Israel that if the Hebrew nation forged an untoward alliance with Egypt, He would bring "evil" (i.e., punishment) upon them. "Thus, scholars have observed that 'evil' can be used with a purely secular meaning to denote physical injury (Jeremiah 39:12), or times of distress (Amos 6:3), and that is its significance in Isaiah 45:7" (Jackson, 1984, 1:84). When Job's wife proposed that he curse God and die, his rejoinder was: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive **evil**?" (Job 2:10; emp. added). Job's meaning is clear: shall we not receive **punishment and correction** from the hand of Jehovah, as well as innumerable blessings? Rex A. Turner Sr. has noted:

Solomon wrote: "A prudent man seeth the evil, and hideth himself; But the simple pass on, and suffer for it" (Prov. 22:3). The meaning of this statement from Solomon is that the prudent man sees public calamity approaching, and he uses all lawful means to secure himself. Evil here is put for dangers and calamities that befall men. Thus, God creates evil only in the sense that he brings punishment or calamity upon those who do evil. In no sense, therefore, has God created criminal or moral evil. In no sense has God provoked or brought about evil in any angel or man (1989, p. 79).

Is Satan a Fallen Angel?

There is compelling textual evidence within the Bible which indicates that originally Satan was one of the angels who inhabited the heavenly realm, and that he (along with others) departed from a righteous state and rebelled against God. There is a hint of this in the Old Testament book of Job. Eliphaz said of God: "Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants; and his angels he chargeth with folly" (Job 4:18). In discussing this wording, renowned commentator Albert Barnes wrote:

Language like this would hardly be employed unless there was a belief that even the holiness of the angels was not incorruptible, and that there had been some revolt there among a part, which rendered it **possible** that others might revolt also (1949, 1:lxiii; emp. in orig.).

Indeed, the New Testament seems to confirm that such a revolt **did** take place. In two separate passages, reference is made to just such a revolt. The apostle Peter said that "God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). Another inspired New Testament writer wrote: "And angels that kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). Since the Bible also refers to Satan as "the prince of demons" (Matthew 12:24), and speaks of "the devil and **his** angels" (Matthew 25:41, emp. added), "...the only possible conclusion is that the devil is the leader of a group of angels who rebelled against God and were therefore expelled from heaven to eventually spend eternity in hell" (Workman, 1981, 1[5]:4).

From references such as these, it is clear that God created angels (just as He has men) with the powers of reason and free will, which made it possible for them both to think and to choose. Turner has commented:

This is to say that angels had the freedom of choice—the freedom to fear and serve God, and the freedom to refuse to fear and serve God. Without intellect and freedom of absolute choice, angels could not be holy as God is holy. In the absence of free will, coupled with responsibility, there can be no true holiness (1989, p. 82).

But, as Lloyd Ecrement has noted: "They, therefore, have the ability to choose good or evil. It is possible, but certainly not necessary, for them to sin. If they choose evil rather than good, that is no reflection upon their Creator, but simply a rebellion against Him—they abuse the powers of reason and a free will given to them by God" (1961, p. 33). Apparently, certain of the angels chose wrongly, which is why Peter referred to the "angels when they **sinned**." But John wrote that sin is "lawlessness" (i.e., transgression of God's law; 1 John 3:4). In some fashion, then, the angels' sin consisted of breaking God's law by not keeping their "proper habitation," but instead departing from whatever appropriate position it was that God had established for them.

Since Scripture speaks of "the devil and his angels," it becomes reasonable to suggest that Satan was either the instigator, or leader (or both), of this heavenly revolt. What brought about this Satanic rebellion? Nichols, in speaking about sedition against legitimately established authority, has suggested that "...rebellion is generally attempted only by the headstrong and obstinate" (1978, p. 262). Henry M. Morris similarly observed:

The root of all sin, in both man and angels, is the twin sin of unbelief and pride—the refusal to submit to God's will as revealed by His own Word and the accompanying assertion of self-sufficiency which enthrones the creature and his own will in the place of God. This was the original sin of Satan, rejecting God's Word and trying to become God Himself (1971, pp. 214-215).

Victor Knowles has added:

Perhaps Satan became proud of his position as an angel and reached out, wanting more power and authority. What else could there be in heaven to battle for? It is possible that he may have harbored bitter envy and selfish ambition in his heart, for James says that such "wisdom" is "of the devil" (Jas. 3:14,15) (1994, p. 70).

When Did Satan Become Evil?

But when, exactly, did all of this take place? Numerous conservative scholars have suggested that likely the creation of the angels occurred during the first day of the creation week, but prior to the creation of the Earth itself (see Jackson, 1980, p. 78; Kelly, 1997, p. 93; Knowles, 1994, p. 69; Turner, 1989, p. 80; Whitcomb, 1972, p. 43). In speaking of God and His original creation, Knowles has commented: "Before creation of the world He created the angels, for they observed the process and rejoiced over it (Psa. 148:2,5)" (1994, p. 69). John C. Whitcomb concurred when he wrote that the angels "must have been created at the very beginning of the first day of creation, for Job 38:6,7 tells of their singing and their shout for joy at the creation of the earth" (1972, p. 43). Douglas Kelly also advocated such a position, but stressed caution, when he wrote:

> Neither Genesis, nor any other text in Scripture, states when the angelic beings were actually created. What is definite is that angels are creatures, and thus do have a beginning. They are immortal, but only the Triune God is eternal, without beginning or endings. Reserve is necessary on such a speculative subject that has not been revealed to us by God in his Word....
>
> Perhaps the angels were brought into being on the very first day of creation. In Job 38:4-7 we are told that the angels were present when the foundations of the earth were laid, and were rejoicing over it all. Psalm 104:2-5 speaks of the shining of God's light during the original creative process, and mentions the angels just before reference to "laying the foundations of the earth." Thus they appear after the creation of all things and before the earth is made a solid body.... These passages from Job and Psalms are certainly poetic, and are presumably not meant to be interpreted in the same precise, chronological sense required by Genesis 1 and 2. Poetic though its literary form is, it must mean something, and bear reference to a true state of affairs. Such passages may take us as far as we can go safely in consideration of the question: when were the angels first created? (1997, pp. 93, 94).

It is significant to remember, of course, that angels are finite, created spirits who were (and are) amenable to God's law. Regardless of the exact time of their creation, the fact remains that certain of the angels, Satan among them, disobeyed that law, and as a result were cast from their spiritual abode. It is accurate to state, therefore, that Satan, and those dismissed from the heavenly realm with him, are fallen angels, and that their creation and transgression occurred sometime prior to God's bringing the Earth into existence.

When They Saw the Star

by Henry M. Morris, Ph.D.

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matthew 2:11).

Each year, as Christmas approaches, articles appear in numerous publications, both secular and religious, "explaining" the famous star whose unspoken testimony led the wise men to Bethlehem when Christ was born. Many theories have been offered, by many learned men, seeking to account for this remarkable event recorded in Matthew 2:1_12. Although a small booklet such as this cannot really do justice to all these studies, it may be helpful to give a summary evaluation of them from the viewpoint of Biblical literalism, assuming "star" means "star."

But before considering the nature of the star itself, there are at least two intriguing questions about this remarkable event that are rarely discussed, even at Christmastime, but which do bear upon its true significance.

1. Just who were these "wise men" and why were they the only ones who realized the importance of the star? None of the political or religious leaders of the Jews seemed aware of it until these men from a distant country suddenly showed up in Jerusalem.

2. Why did the appearance of these three (?) travelers, with their question, inspire such agitation among King Herod and these Jewish leaders? When the wise men saw the star over Bethlehem, they were excited and joyful. Why did not Herod and the Jewish leaders rejoice with them?

3. Finally, just what was this star, and how could it possibly lead them on such a long journey to just the right location, especially since every one else in the very city of the promised Messiah seemed unaware of it?

Let's take a brief look at possible answers to these fascinating questions.

Who Were the Wise Men and How Did They Know?

The common legend about the wise men says that there were three of them, named Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar, from three different nations (Babylonia, Persia, and India). One early writer called them three kings.

However, all this is traditional, with no basis in Scripture. The phrase "wise men," in Matthew 2:1,7, is Magi (or Magoi) in the Greek original, and applies to members of a special group of men. A class of scholars called the Magi (from which our modern word "magic" is derived) may originally have come from a certain tribe in Media, and may even have later become a part of the governing body of Persia. This is uncertain, but what does appear to be well established is the fact that they were especially interested in astronomy and the prophetic "wisdom" that this talent seemed to give them.

They eventually became a sort of priestly caste, and were attached to the royal courts of Babylonia and Persia and even those of more distant lands such as Arabia and India, as consultants and advisers to the nobles of those lands.

There is even an ancient tradition that Balaam, the notorious prophet from Mesopotamia, was an early member of the Magi, perhaps even their founder. If so, this fact would at least partially explain why the

Magi at the time of Christ were aware that a special star would be used by God to announce the Savior's birth to this world. It was Balaam's prophecy, of course, as recorded in the Bible, that spoke of this future star. Here is his prophecy, actually constrained by God to be uttered against the prophet's own will.

I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth, and Edom shall be a possession. Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city (Numbers 24:17_19).

Thus Balaam's reluctant, but divinely inspired, prophecy, revealed that a unique Star associated with Israel would accompany a future Sceptre (that is, King) who would eventually rule the world.

The later Magi, especially those in Babylon and Persia (where the influence of Daniel, as well as Mordecai and Esther) had been profound and long-lasting, would surely be familiar with this prophecy and also the various prophecies of Daniel (who had been the most respected of the "wise men" at the courts of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus?note Daniel 2:45; 6:28).

Some of the Magi may even have been Jews in religion, if not in ethnicity. At the time of God's great deliverance of the Jews in Persia during the days of Queen Esther, it was recorded that "many of the people of the land became Jews" (Esther 8:17). This event in itself would constrain many of the Persian members of the Magi at that time to study the Jewish sacred books, especially the Messianic prophecies of Daniel. This lore would have become a key part of the Magi's traditional learning, handed down generation after generation, even to the time of Christ.

Among these Danielic prophecies, of course, given during the reign of Darius the Mede, was the great prophecy of the "seventy weeks," which revealed that the Messiah would come as Prince of Israel 483 years after the Persian emperor gave the commandment to the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24,25). It would easily be possible for the Persian Magi, as the promised date came near, to put these prophecies of Balaam and Daniel together, and thus be watching for "His star" to appear.

Something like this may at least partly explain why the Persian Magi?and not the Herodians and the rationalistic Sadducees (who comprised most of the Jewish religious leaders of the time) were aware of the significance of the star when it appeared. It is quite possible also that the "wise men" from this same caste who were prominent as counsellors in Babylon and other lands (even Arabia and India) were also aware of what was happening. It may be possible (as the tradition suggests) that Magi from other lands as well as Persia joined the entourage journeying to Jerusalem to seek this promised "King of the Jews." There is no convincing reason to think that only three Magi came. The fact that three types of gifts (gold, frankincense, myrrh) were offered does not mean that only three men offered the gifts. The Bible does not say how many there were, but there may well have been many more than three.

Why Were Herod and the Jews so Troubled by the Magi's Visit?

It would, indeed, seem rather unlikely that the visit of three itinerant "astrologers" would create such a stir in Jerusalem. In the first place, how could these foreigners ever get in to see King Herod? Why would their question cause the king to be "troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:3).

But all this becomes clear when it is realized that the visitors probably consisted of much more than three

foreign "astrologers" (as a number of modern translations call the "wise men"). There were very likely more than three Magi in the group, probably a dozen or more. They had come from "the east," and were themselves representatives of one or more great nations, traveling no doubt with a military escort and a sizable entourage of servants.

Even so, why should this upset a powerful king acting under authority of the great Roman empire, supposedly dominant in all the known world of that time. Herod had been appointed "King of the Jews," by no less then the great Caesar Augustus himself, so why should he be troubled by these dignitaries from the east?

The fact is, however, that the Roman empire was not dominant in all the known world. In fact, the various nations "east" of Judaea?Persia, Babylonia, Assyria, etc.?were not part of the Roman empire at all, but rather part of the large and powerful Parthian empire, which was a serious rival to Rome and had defeated several attempts by the Roman legions (including one led by Herod himself, before he became king) to subjugate her. There is reason to believe that, at this time, the Parthians (i.e., Persians) were actually threatening Rome along the nearby boundaries of the Roman empire.

Herod had been appointed "King of the Jews" as his official title by Rome, but here was a delegation from a powerful enemy empire demanding information about someone "born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). No wonder Herod was troubled. Furthermore, the entourage was not traveling on camels (as the Christmas cards tend to picture them) but on strong horses (for that was how Persian nobles travelled), and they were quite confident that this coming King was already in the land and that His presence had been announced by God Himself through a star in the heavens.

The rest of Jerusalem was also "troubled" by what seemed an imminent threat of invasion. The religious leaders were undoubtedly embarrassed, as well as troubled, that they, of all people, had to be informed by foreigners about the coming of Messiah.

Although these Jewish religious leaders were not looking for the Messiah, and did not really want Him to come and upset their own profitable operations, they did at least know about the messianic prophecies. King Herod, who was a descendant of Edomites, did not know the prophecies himself, but when he inquired of the chief priests and scribes, they were able to tell him where this coming King Messiah was to be born. Paraphrasing Micah 5:2, they said: "Thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (Matthew 2:5,6).

Whether these Jewish leaders were familiar with Balaam's prophecy of the Star or not, the account does not say. In any case, they had not paid any heed to the actual Star when it appeared, though they must have seen it. Just What Was This Remarkable Star?

If we really seek to take the Bible literally, we need to think of this star as a real star, not an angel or some miraculous atmospheric light which the wise men thought was a star. The Greek word, aster, occurs some 24 times in the New Testament. A similar word, astron, is used four times. Both words refer specifically to real stars, unless the context indicates otherwise.

It is true that stars are sometimes used to symbolize angels (e.g., Revelation 1:20; 12:4,7) or even human beings (Jude 13). It is also true that planets, meteorites, and comets were apparently considered "stars" by the astronomers of that day and even by the Lord Jesus Himself (e.g., Matthew 24:29). But such usages are always apparent in the context.

The account of the wise men, however, is given as a simple historical record, and the Magi certainly knew what a star was as well as anybody in that day, and they called it a star (in fact, His star), not an angel or an atmospheric guiding light of some kind. They were familiar with the record of the glory cloud (the Shekinah) that had guided the Israelites under Moses in the wilderness (e.g., Numbers 14:14), for it was in the same book of the Torah as the account of Balaam's star. Yet they called it a star, not a glory cloud or any other kind of moving light in the sky.

Nevertheless, many fine Bible teachers, unable to see how a fixed star in the heavens (or even a moving star like a planet or comet) could actually guide the Magi to the very house in Bethlehem where the infant Christ was staying, have decided it must have been an angel or the Shekinah or some other miraculous moving light, seen only by these foreign wise men.

But the idea that the "star" was not really a star involves serious difficulties, in addition to that posed by the straightforward use of "star" in the narrative.

Why, for example, would God send such a special aerial messenger 600 miles away to Persia, and not to those in Israel itself who were anticipating the coming Messiah? The Jewish leaders were not watching for Him, of course, but there were many who were. God did send a choir of angels and "the glory of the Lord" to a group of shepherds near the manger in Bethlehem to announce the birth (Luke 2:9_12), but what about the faithful remnant in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel? The account refers to "all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38) and mentions Simeon and Anna in particular. These two, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, even recognized the infant Jesus as the promised Messiah when Mary and Joseph, after the forty "days of her purification according to the law of Moses [see Leviticus 12:2_6] brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord" (Luke 2:22). Why had such devout Jews, waiting for the Messiah, not been informed about His birth in Bethlehem?

Furthermore, how would the Magi, far off in Persia, recognize this supposed moving light as announcing the King of the Jews, impelling them to undertake a long and dangerous journey to greet Him? And why would the light not have led them directly to Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem and Herod's court?

As a matter of fact, Matthew's account never says the Star (or moving light, if that's what it was) ever "led" them at all. It says merely that they saw the Star twice?once while they were at home "in the east," then later, as it "stood over where the young child was" (Matthew 2:2,9). There is no record that they saw it at all during the long journey to Jerusalem.

The guiding light hypothesis appeals to many evangelicals, since they are usually willing to accept the local miracles of Scripture (such as Christ's turning water into wine, or even the restoration of Lazarus' dead body four days after he died). Miracles that require God's intervention in the entire world, however, such as the global flood in the days of Noah, or the long day of Joshua, are not so readily believed, even by many evangelicals, and they often seek materialistic explanations for them, if possible.

For example, a very popular explanation offered for the star by many is that the "star" was merely a conjunction of two or three planets at the time of Christ's birth. The great astronomer, Johann Kepler, was apparently the first to suggest this type of explanation. In 1605 he calculated that there had been a conjunction of three planets (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars) in 7 B.C. Many others have followed this idea, assuming that this conjunction constituted the Christmas star. It was said to have occurred in the constellation Pisces at that time, and this constellation was believed by astrologers to be the Zodiacal sign related to Israel.

Others have said that a conjunction of Jupiter, Venus, and the star Regulus in 3 B.C. was the Christmas star. All such conjunction theories, however, face several serious difficulties. It seems incredible that the Magi, as versed in astronomy as they were, would call such a group of stars "His" Star! No two of these stars were ever so close together as to look like a single star?never even appearing to touch each other! Furthermore, all such planetary conjunctions occur with some significant frequency, which could have been calculated easily enough by these experienced astronomers from the known orbits of the planets, so why would any one, or several, such conjunctions be associated as a special "sign" with the promised King of Israel? There was certainly nothing miraculous about them.

Still more importantly, this sort of thing?associating star and planetary and Zodiacal positions with events on Earth?is a prominent feature of the occult art of astrology, and astrology is condemned in the Bible (Isaiah 47:13_15; etc.). It would not seem reasonable for God to associate anything concerning His promised incarnation with the pseudo-science of astrology which He had warned His people to avoid.

Similar objections apply to the suggestion of some writers, both ancient and modern, that the Christmas star was a comet. Comets also are fairly frequent and travel in regular, predictable orbits, just like planets and their conjunctions. They also have a different appearance than or dinary stars or planets, with a sort of tail following each of them, and the Magi undoubtedly could distinguish them from real stars. They were also commonly used as astrological predictors whenever they occurred, and would thus seem unsuitable for God's purpose in sending His Star.

There does remain one special type of star which does not involve any of the difficulties discussed above. These are the novas (formerly called "new stars") or, still more intriguingly, the rare supernovas. These are real stars, not conjunctions of stars, or comets, and certainly not atmospheric phenomena.

Was His Star a Real Star after All?

Novas and supernovas are sudden, rare, entirely unpredictable explosions of existing stars that had been originally created on Day Four of Creation Week. Somehow what seems to be an ordinary star suddenly increases tremendously in brilliance, continuing so for several months until it finally fades away.

Since supernovas are very rare and entirely unpredictable, they have no astrological significance. There have only been a few visible supernovas reported in our galaxy, the oldest of which occurred in 1054 A.D., as reported by Chinese astronomers. There was one reported by Tycho Brahe in 1572 A.D., and one by Kepler in 1604 A.D. Others have been seen with the aid of large telescopes, but these were not available to the Magi, of course.

Although we have no firm official astronomical record of a visible supernova occurring at the time of Christ's birth, such a stellar phenomenon would surely be appropriate to announce the birth of Christ. There surely must have been a few supernovas before 1054 A.D., and the fact that no records of these have been preserved is merely an argument from silence. A great Christian astronomer, E. W. Maunder, for fifty years Superintendent of the Solar Department of the Royal Greenwich Observatory, and president of the British Astronomical Observatory, came to the conclusion that such a star (called, in his day, a "new star" or "temporary star") was the only logical explanation for the Star of Bethlehem. He devoted a strong chapter to this subject in his book, Astronomy and the Bible, published in 1908,

As a matter of fact, there may well be certain other hazy records of such a star. In the Bible, the only mention of the star is in Matthew 2:1_12. However, a number of the early Christian writers were fascinated

with the account, and apparently did some contemporary research of their own in extra-Biblical sources.

For example, Ignatius, who was the apostolic father closest in time to the New Testament writers (died 107 A.D.) wrote of the star as follows: "(It was) a star which so shone in heaven beyond all the stars, its newness caused excitement." The pseudepigraphical writing known as The Protoevangelium of James quotes the wise men as saying to Herod: "We saw how an indescribably great star shone among these stars and dimmed them so that they no longer shone, and so we knew that a King was born for Israel."

Eusebius, a scholarly church historian of the early fourth century, evidently made a considerable study of the literature available from the centuries before him, and came to this conclusion about the star. "The star was new and a stranger among the usual lights of heaven, a strange star besides the usual ones, a strange and unusual star, not one of the many known stars, but being new and fresh."

A recent writer, Robert McIver, has spent three decades researching this subject. In his book, Star of Bethlehem-Star of Messiah, published 1998, he cites star records from ancient Chinese and Korean astronomers who both noted such an unusual new star about the time of Christ's birth. He also discusses paintings in the Roman catacombs, as well as coins from various countries which depict an unusual star about this time. He even notes possible sightings of the star in the Americas. Much of his evidence is vulnerable to other possible interpretations, but it is at least an interesting coincidence, if nothing else, that such indications of an unusual new star at about the time of Christ's birth can be found all over the world.

In any case, although it is not possible to be dogmatic, it does seem that the most feasible explanation for the Christmas star is that it was a real star, rather than either a conjunction of two or more stars or a special moving light of some kind in the lower atmosphere. After all the Magi called it a star, and they would surely know the difference. The Persian Magi in particular were very competent observational astronomers, not astrologists. If they were not Jews or Jewish proselytes (either of which is a good possibility), they were Zoroastrians, and the Zorastrian religion was similar to Judaism in many respects, among which was an aversion to astrology.

They were almost certainly acquainted with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, especially Balaam's prophecy of a new Star which would signal the rising of a great King in Israel. Balaam himself was probably a member of the Magi, possibly even the founder of their caste. Zoroaster also was probably one of the earlier Magi, between the times of Balaam and Christ.

Thus it is significant that both Balaam's divinely inspired prophecy and Matthew's divinely inspired history recognized it as a star?in fact as "His" Star! Unless God created a brand new star at this time, which is possible, of course, the most realistic explanation is that it was either a nova, or (more probably) a supernova?a gigantic explosion of an existing, but previously unknown, star.

As noted before, this was the conclusion of the late British astronomer, E. W. Maunder. He simply called it a "new star," the terms nova and supernova not yet having come into use in his day. In a more recent scientific article, "The Star of Bethlehem," published in Science Digest in December 1976, James Mullaney says: "The considered opinion of nearly all who have studied the question is that a nova or supernova seems the most likely explanation for the Christmas star of all those put forth to date" (p.65).

Mullaney also makes the cogent observation: "Truly, here is a celestial announcement card above all others worthy the birth of a king" (ibid.). A supernova explosion radiates more energy into space at its peak than all the stars in our own galaxy combined! The entrance of the Creator into His creation as a man among men would surely warrant the most majestic announcement possible by His creation. An angelic host

announced it at the scene?a mighty star to the rest of the world!

The mechanistic details of what causes such a stellar explosion and its after-effects are still rather obscure scientifically, and their occurrences are altogether unpredictable as to time and place. How, then, did Balaam know that one would occur at the time of Messiah's birth, some 1400 years in the future?

The information came from God, that's how! While it is true that "new" stars, as well as comets and meteors and planetary conjunctions, have often in the past been taken as astrologically associated with the rise or fall of great men, it is also true that no astrologer or anyone else has ever predicted such an event hundreds of years before it happened.

Having created the stars, God is well able to set off an explosion in one of them whenever He chooses, and also to inform one of His prophets about it as far in advance as He chooses. There is really no better explanation of Balaam's remarkable prophecy (even given against the prophet's own will!) and the miraculous birth of Christ which eventually, in God's own time, fulfilled it.

But just how did the Magi know that this star, this supernova (assuming that's what it was) was His Star, the one prophesied so long ago by Balaam. After all, there had also probably been other "new stars" from time to time. This was surely not the first.

Or was it? There are records of earlier comets and earlier conjunctions, and these had indeed been considered to be astrological portents of one kind or another, but there have never yet been found any firm records of earlier novas. In fact, the Biblical chronology assures us (evolutionary astronomers to the contrary notwithstanding) that the stars were created only a few thousand years ago, and in general should not be subject to such an explosive disintegration process so soon, or so we would suggest.

That is, unless God Himself triggered it! There have been many other novas since that time, of course, and also a few supernovas, but perhaps God has allowed these just to show us that such things are possible. They do at least reinforce and support His revealed truth that His creation was completed in the past (Genesis 2:1_3). It is being conserved quantitatively, but decaying qualitatively, in the present, by the entropy principle (compare Psalm 102:25_27). This had been established by God's primeval curse on all man's dominion because of sin (Genesis 3:17_20; Romans 8:20_22; etc.), and will continue until Christ returns to renew His creation in the ages to come.

In any case, there were ways in which the Magi (as well as others, if they had been watching for it) could identify this new star as Balaam's prophesied star. As noted earlier, they could well have known from Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy, as well as others, that the time of His coming was near, so they were watching for the star in their regular astronomical observations.

There is also the very realistic possibility that this new star occurred in one of the constellations which had been associated with God's primeval promise of the coming Savior. This "protevangel" (that is, "first Gospel") prophesied the age-long conflict between the Serpent (that is, Satan) and the Seed of the Woman (that is, Christ). The Serpent would inflict a serious bruise on the woman's seed, but eventually Christ will destroy Satan forever (Genesis 3:15).

This primeval promise is reflected in many of the star-pictures of the constellations, especially the twelve signs of the Zodiac and their decans (or related constellations). While these star messages have been badly corrupted by astrology, they do predate any astrological meanings later imposed on them. In fact, the Scriptures themselves imply that these pictures and their primeval meanings were established originally by

God Himself, through the ancient patriarchs (Seth in particular, according to the Jewish historian Josephus).

In the Genesis record of God's creation of the stars, they were said to be for "signs," as well as for "seasons, days, and years," (Genesis 1:14). Then, according to God's message to Job, it was only God who could "bring forth Mazzaroth in his season" (Job 38:32), where Mazzaroth refers specifically to the twelve signs of the Zodiac?that is, the constellations which have been designated as representing the Virgin, the Balances, the Fishes, the Lion, etc.

Certain individual constellations are even mentioned by name as having been formed by God?that is, "Arcturus, Orion, the Pleiades" (Job 9:8), the "crooked serpent" (Job 26:13), and others. God is also said to have named the stars (Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26). Such Scriptures indicate God had a purpose in identifying these stars and constellations and that purpose certainly was not to serve astrology. The most reasonable inference is that He wanted to imprint His purposes and promises on the very heavens themselves, so they could be seen in all times and nations, especially before His written Word would become available. Thus "the heavens declare the glory of God "and have been uttering speech and showing knowledge day and night throughout the world" (Psalm 19:1,2), ever since the beginning.

A number of these ancient constellations, despite millennia of astrological distortion, do still show clear reflections of God's primeval promise. The great Christian astronomer E. W. Maunder noted this, as have various other scientists and theologians through the years. For example, the sign of the Virgin suggests the promise of a virgin-born Savior, as implied in the very phrase "seed of the woman" (men, not women, generate "seed," so a miracle would be required for a woman to do so). The sign of Leo the Lion pictures a conquering lion slaying a fleeing serpent. Similar related messages can be deduced from many of the other signs.

It is difficult at this late date to pinpoint the specific constellation in which the star appeared. The date of Christ's birth is uncertain and so is the date of the star. But it does seem reasonable to assume that it appeared in a constellation which the Magi knew was depicting the coming of the promised Redeemer.

These were devout men, believing in the true God of creation and the promises in His Word. They were undoubtedly familiar also with the original signs and symbols God had imposed on the stars, and thus were able to recognize that this new star that had suddenly blazed forth in the sky must indeed be "His Star," the star announcing the birth of the promised King.

They were so elated that they decided to make the long pilgrimage to Jerusalem to find and worship Him. However, this could not be arranged overnight. Considerable time would be needed to assemble an entourage of servants and armed guards, supplies for the whole company, gifts for the holy child, and perhaps even arrangements for meeting up with Magi coming from other regions with the same purpose. But finally they were ready, and set out on the long journey.

What Does His Star Mean to us Today?

Supernovas may shine brilliantly for many months and possibly longer, but this is a disintegration process and they finally fade out of sight. Also, as the earth moves along in its orbit around the sun, the night sky changes. Stars that were seen at one time during the year will soon be lost in the daytime, hidden by the sun's brightness, later in the year. Presumably this was happening to the Magi's star, so they could no longer see it as they travelled. They did not need it to guide them, however, as they knew it had announced Israel's coming King, and they assumed He would be in Jerusalem by the time they arrived.

In the meantime, Mary and Joseph had travelled from their home in Nazareth in Galilee, to Judaea, in order to be counted in the Roman census at Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph's family. While there in Bethlehem, the child Jesus was born.

Although announced both by the heavenly host in the air above Bethlehem and also by the new star, neither announcement made any particular stir in Jerusalem. The shepherds had spread the news around Bethlehem, and later Simeon and Anna around Jerusalem (Luke 2:17; 2:38), but only a few realized the real significance of the event. After all, there had been various other alleged Messiahs who had come and gone. Not even the star had seemed to arouse any Messianic interest, although surely many had seen it. The Jews as a whole were interested in neither astronomy nor astrology. They apparently had little interest in Balaam's prophecy of the star, either, possibly because he was a Gentile who had been slain by the Israelites at the time of Moses.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, several months after they first saw the star (possibly even as long as two years after, in view of Herod's later slaughter of the children, according to Matthew 2:16), they apparently assumed that the newborn King would have been brought to Jerusalem by that time, or at least that Herod could tell them where to find Him. Instead, Herod and "all Jerusalem" were merely "troubled," widely fearful that the Parthians and Persians might attempt to install this new King on the throne of Judaea. When the scribes cited Micah 5:2 as evidence that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Herod sent them there in search of Him.

Then, as they headed toward Bethlehem, six miles away, they suddenly saw the Star again. Even though they had not been able to see it while traveling to Jerusalem, it had indeed been going before them and now appeared once again, probably in the early morning sky.

The Biblical account says that the star "came and stood over where the young child was" (Matthew 2:9). That seems to indicate that, when the star reached its zenith position, it was over Bethlehem. Obviously, they didn't need the star to guide them to Bethlehem, but when they saw it again, they "rejoiced with exceeding great joy," because this meant that their understanding of Scripture was right and this was, indeed, His Star!

There is an ancient story, which could possibly be true, that as the Magi entered Bethlehem, they saw the star's reflection in the water at the bottom of a well, and that this was how they knew that the star was actually vertically over the village. The story has been cited by the Christian astronomer Maunder as realistic, even though unconfirmed. The Biblical account does not say that the star stood above the actual house, of course, but it would be easy enough to find out from the townspeople where the babe was, for the town was not large.

When they finally saw Him, they forthwith "fell down, and worshipped Him" (Matthew 2:11).

And so should we!

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