*Hammer**

Jeremiah 23:25-31 (25) I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.
(26) How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;
(27) Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal.
(28) The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.
(29) Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and **like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces**?
(30) Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.
(31) Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.
Warnings of false prophets are an indispensable part of God's instructions to mankind because He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Remember; It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63). *The Gospel truths, which are the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, are the means of conveying the Spirit of God as a spirit of illumination and sanctification into the hearts of men, and of quickening sinners that are dead in trespasses and sins;* All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2Tim 3:16). *We hear this scripture quite often, but true faith is the effect of hearing the word. All to often a person may unwittingly repeat something that is an alteration, however*

slight. Have you ever repeated an aphorism only to be unable to find it in scripture? I'm sure we all have had that experience. Perhaps there is a scriptural basis for it, but not always. The key to righteousness is to; Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2Tim 2:15).
Endeavor to cultivate and improve your heart and mind, to walk in the gospel way and use the gospel as a hammer breaking into pieces aphorism's contrary to the gospel.
The phrase, "Moderation in all things";
is a common phrase perhaps we all use, but what about Scripture? Although there are no direct quotations matching the proverb, there are scriptural evidences that impart such a lively impression, listen to this;
And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible (1 Corinthians 9:25).
Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand (Philippians 4:5).
In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; (1Tim 2:9).
We are to indulge in no excess of passion, or dress, or eating, or drinking. We are to govern our appetites, restrain our temper, and be examples of what is proper for people in view of the expectation of the Lord. Al-tho the phrase "Moderation in all things" is not a direct quote, it is nonetheless based upon scripture and is a quality to be desired.
Slogans like "Once Saved, Always Saved";
are always regrettable because they polarize an issue, causing them to be touted vehemently, not on the basis of truth, but only as it is represented in the stark world of sloganeering. Once Saved, Always Saved is based upon the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. However it deviates from the scriptures by only representing a portion of Biblical teaching

*while completely ignoring the remaining portion of scriptural obedience. While salvation is a genuine Biblical notion and Scripture does point out that man should be saved, souls too often view "once saved always saved" as an effect of a profession resulting from a "faith only" doctrine rather than the result of God's work of saving grace. Obviously, anyone can make a confession of faith, that is "faith only", and live a lifetime without any external evidence of the work of redemption in their lives and be completely outside the work of grace. Though in ignorance they might be referred to as saved, they are anything but. Their profession and life are counterfeits of the life of the honestly saved. The honestly saved were obedient to the words spoken by Jesus, "*he that believeth and is baptized*." Al-tho baptism is not the only requirement, because belief effects all salvation precepts, faith, repentance, confession and baptism. The doctrine of Christ declares that those who are counterfeits were never recipients of the persevering work of God's grace and did not receive at anytime the cleansing and redemptive work in Christ. James the Lord's brother, is adamant in his defiance of the counterfeit "faith alone" doctrine;* Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone (James 2:17). *Therefore, "Faith alone" is dead by default. The doctrine of Christ maintains that--those who have been obedient to the faith and overcome the world—those who abide in Him until they die are saved and will be taken up to heaven. "Once saved, always saved" is a slogan that is in opposition to actual scriptural teaching. Don't take my word, turn to;*

Hebrews 6:4-6 (4) For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,
(5) And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,
(6) If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God

afresh, and put him to an open shame.
Al-tho a man may believe in a way that seemeth right, the word of God is a hammer that will break any slogan of man into pieces.
The Slogan "Spare the rod, spoil the child";
despite popular opinion the famous saying cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. The saying, however, should not be considered invalid as there are verses that promote the concept. There is Biblical basis for the proverb, but not the actual wording. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (Proverbs 13:24). Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15). *However, the behaviour of an undisciplined child effects not only the child but others around him, are you listening?* The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Proverbs 29:15). *Here is something for Christians to the think about because we are God's children,* If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Heb 12:7). *Spare the rod? Not if you love the child! Abuse the child! NEVER!*
"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you";
while this proverbial phrase is not a direct quote in the Bible, it does have a Biblical parallel found in the following verses: Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them (Matt 7:12). And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise (Luke 6:31). *However be aware; your kindness extended to others does not guarantee kindness in return. There is another aphorism that says; no good deed goes unpunished. Is not Jesus our example of this? If one should receive wrath in exchange for kindness, give place unto wrath for it is written,* Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord (Romans 12:19). *Further research indicates that the earliest known origin comes from a*

catechism from the year 1583 (which reprints an earlier of the same from 1567). The particulars of the phrase may in fact date further back even than this, as the idea of an ethical reciprocal idea has been common throughout the world even into ancient histories (we find evidence even in the ancient Greeks). So, in the end, while the saying does not appear in its common form in any of the more literal translations of Scripture, its sentiment is certainly biblical.
"God helps those who help themselves";
a more contemporary place of origin and one which matches the common wording identically, comes to us by way of Benjamin Franklin (Poor Richard's Almanac, 1736). Franklin himself was a deist and so he believed that God did not play an active role in men's lives. In his point of view, if man was not able to help himself, then man was hopeless. The Bible teaches something entirely different than his saying, because God makes special provision to help the hopeless, let's turn to;
Romans 5:6-8 (6) For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
(7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
(8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
Don't you see that while we were still helpless in the grasp of sin, at the right time Christ died for you and me....And God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet helpless in sin, His Son died giving us power to become the Sons of God. This transcending power is the gospel of Christ.
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). *He who trusts in his own heart, could very well be lead into a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of eternal damnation. The wise trust in the word of the Lord,*
turn with me to;

Jeremiah 17:5-8 (5) Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.
(6) For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.
(7) Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.
(8) For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.
Al-tho there is no direct quotation, "God helps those who help themselves" in scripture, the concept none-the-less is conveyed. Consider this one important fact, he who helps himself to the gospel of Christ and is obedient to it will receive an inheritance of life eternal. Don"t take my word, turn to;
1Peter 1:3-4 (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath **begotten us again** unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
(4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
"God works in mysterious ways";
though uncertain in origin and certainly not found in Scripture (the phrase may originate from William Cowper's hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"). The fact that God does work in ways curious and beyond the measure of our limited experience and conception is obvious. Deuteronomy 29:29 *reminds us that:* The secret things belong to the Lord our God. *The final chapters of Job present God's reprimand of Job wherein He asks how Job could possibly understand or judge the reasons for God's actions (Job being so far removed from*

God in power, wisdom, and longevity). And perhaps the biggest mystery is revealed in Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. *Though we may not understand the purpose of our circumstances in God's plan, we are assured that every detail will work for the benefit of the Redeemed. Tho the exact phrase, "God works in mysterious ways", is not recorded in scripture, mystery is relevant;*

1Corinthians 2:7-9 (7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
(8) Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
(9) But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Ephesians 5:31-32 (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
(32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

There are mysteries concerning the world that man does not understand because; In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1). *Many learned men think they have discovered how the earth was made. But have they really? Listen to this;* Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it (Ecclesiastes 8:17).
God asked Job, Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding (Job 38:4).
O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely

so called: (1 Timothy 6:20).
So while the exact wording, "God works in mysterious ways" is not found in scripture, it does have a basis in scripture.
"Cleanliness is next to godliness";
the book of Leviticus frequently deals with the issue of cleanliness and impurity so that the Children of Israel would be clean as a sign of separation from the surrounding nations. Yet in the New Testament, cleanliness finds mention in relation to the cleansing in the believer's life. Listen to this; If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2Corinthians 7:1). *Now turn to;*
Ephesians 5:25-27 (25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
(26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
(27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
In the new testament there is much less importance put upon bodily cleanliness and much more importance when it applies to spiritual cleanliness. Jesus taught this in;
Matthew 15:1-3,10-11 (1) Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
(2) Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.
(3) But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?
(10) And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:
(11) Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.
1Peter 3:21 *puts it this way;* 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: *This is the perfect analogy of the purpose of water in the salvation plan;*
(1) in like manner baptism saves,
(2) water is the medium used for baptism,
(3) baptism in water is not for putting away the filth of the flesh,
(4) baptism is an answer of a good conscience toward God.
"Cleanliness is next to Godliness" is not a New Testament doctrine in the sense it would apply to bodily cleanliness. Would there be something next to Godliness? And if so, what is it? Turn to;
2Peter 1:5-7 (5) And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;
(6) And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;
(7) And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.
What is next to Godliness? There is faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance and patience on one side of Godliness and brotherly kindness and charity on the other.
"The Sinner's Prayer";
though not quite a saying in itself, we hear tell of the Sinner's Prayer enough that it's easy to see why some may have come to believe it is of Biblical origin—and why they want to know the exact wording as found in Scripture for the lauded prayer. The fact is, there is neither any specific formula found in Scripture for a Sinner's Prayer nor is there any biblical example of such a prayer being recommended for the salvation experience. The modern usage of the Sinner's Prayer originates in the 19th Century and was popularized by the experience-oriented evangelistic style of Charles Finney. As Scripture presents it, men should believe, by faith repent, confess Jesus to be the Son of God, and be baptized into Him

thereby receiving forgiveness of sin. There is no mention of altar calls or sinner's prayers or requesting Christ to enter into one's heart. That said, we shouldn't go so far as to claim a Sinner Praying to be a bad thing, we should consider the Prayer of a sinner as simply an initial instance of honesty in a new believer's growing relationship with the Lord that he is now willing to obey and serve. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth (John 9:31).

Tho the sinner's prayer is not found in scripture, one should not attempt to prevent prayer, but should encourage obedience to; He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.

"The Three Wisemen";

during the advent season it is quite common to hear people tell the story of the three wise men, who, following the Star of Bethlehem, traveled from Babylonia on camels to present gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the infant Jesus. This story, however, has just as much mythology as biblical truth. The Gospel of Matthew is the only place in Scripture that refers to these magi, but does not reveal how many there were.

The wise men today are following Jesus by faith in His word. They come to Jesus requesting the gift of life from Him. They know and understand that Faith in Christ is the effect of belief, that repentance, confessing Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and submitting to baptism is the effect of faith. If there is one that has not accepted the gift of life, today is your day. Accept it while you can, tomorrow the door may be shut. If there is one needing prayer for other reasons, in either case come while we gently hammer you with spiritual song.

This message approved by
Jack Warford
a minister for Christ

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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