

Corrected Translation of Matt 2:1-14; The Mystery of the Star: Intro: Kochav & Aster: the Meanings of "Star" in Scripture; Matthew's Account of the Star in 2:1-12; Is "Star" to Be Taken Literally or Figuratively; Uses of "Star" in Scripture: Jesus Christ, the Bright Morning Star, Rev 22:16

Our corrected translation of Matthew 2:1-14 reads this way:

Matthew 2:1 - After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from regions to the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,

v. 2 - "Where is presently He who has been born previously the King of the Jews? Because we in the east saw His star and we have come to prostrate ourselves before Him in worship as our superior."

v. 3 - When Herod the king heard this, he had great trepidation, and all Jerusalem with him.

v. 4 - Assembling together all the chief priests, who were Sadducees, and scribes, who were Pharisees, of the Jews, Herod grilled them about where the Christ was to be born.

v. 5 - They [the priests and scribes] said to him [Herod], "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written in the past and thus stands written forever by the prophet:

v. 6 - "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."

v. 7 - Then Herod met privately with the Magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

v. 8 - And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child; and when you have found Him, assuming that you do, report back to me, for the purpose that I, too, may come and worship Him."

v. 9 - After hearing the king, they departed, and the same star, which they had previously seen in the east, proceeded before them until it came to a halt where the Child was.

v. 10 - When they saw the star, they entered into a state of overabundance of happiness with great exultation.

v. 11 - When they entered the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; they threw themselves down prostrate and worshipped Him. Then opening their treasures, they presented Him gifts of great wealth: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

v. 12 - And having been divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi left for Parthia by the King's Highway.

v. 13 - Now when the Magi had gone, behold, the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and hurry into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is on the verge of deploying a search and destroy mission to execute the Child.

v. 14 - So Joseph got up and took to himself in protective custody the Child and His mother and, while it was still night, evacuated to Egypt.

I. Introduction:

Throughout the history of the Church Age there has been much wonderment about the revelations in Matthew 2:1-12. The Magi and the star that announced the birth of Jesus are the two subjects that have caused the most controversy.

The identification of the Magi has successfully been resolved. They were Parthians. They rode horses, not camels, and they came to visit the Messiah not at the manger on the night of His birth but in a house in Bethlehem some eighteen months later. There were possibly hundreds of Magi that made the trip, not three.

But the mystery that remains unsolved is the identity of what has been referred to extra biblically as the “star of Bethlehem.” Controversy abounds concerning its makeup. We have recently noted the several applications the word star has in Scripture and it bears repeating:

The word for star is the noun כֹּכַב (*kochav*) in Hebrew and ἀστὴρ (*astēr*) in Greek. It has many meanings in Scripture other than “star.” Examples include (1) [Angels](#) e.g., the guardian angels of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 (Revelation 1:20), (2) [Planets](#): (a) Venus which is likened to Christ in Revelation 22:16, (b) Saturn, called Kiyun, כִּיּוּן (*kī'-un*), in Amos 5:26, and (c) the morning star which can include all planets which may rise first in the morning: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, or Saturn, (3) [Constellations](#): (a) Bear, (b) Orion, and (c) Pleiades (Job 9:9; 38:31, 32, and Amos 5:8, and (4) [Meteors](#) (Revelation 8:10).

Our task will be to determine which among these uses applies to the star of Bethlehem. To do that we must research the writings of those theologians who have given a go at defining the substance that communicated to the Magi. This will take us to a number of authors who present their studied opinions of the star’s true identity.

Although there are some minor differences among the writers consulted, there are only two logical solutions to the identity of Matthew’s star. Therefore, the first thing we must do is go back to the passage and list all the facts it presents regarding the star. It is with these facts that we must deal in our evaluation of the writers we will consult and the conclusions we will ultimately reach.

Matthew’s Account of the Star in Matthew 2:1-12:

1. The Magi were not led to the Messiah by the star since they had to inquire of Herod of the Lord’s whereabouts (v. 2a).
2. The Magi classified it as the King of the Jews’ star (v. 2a).
3. The Magi *saw* the star originally while in Parthia, therefore, it was a visual phenomenon (v. 2b).
4. The direction they observed it was the east (v. 2b).
5. The Magi informed Herod of the time of their observation of the star (v. 7). (Verse 16 enables us to infer that the sighting was somewhat less than two years prior to their arrival in Jerusalem.)
6. The star reappeared to the Magi a second time (v. 9b).
7. The text of verse 9 agrees with the statement in verse 2 that the original observance was in the east (v. 9c).
8. The star sightings in verses 2 and 9 were of the same star (v. 9c).

9. The star goes before them on their trip to Bethlehem indicating that its location is now in the south (v. 9d).
10. The star is said to “stand over the place where the Child was” (v. 9e), namely, a house v. 11a).

The dilemma that this passage presents to the exegete is whether to take the word *star* literally or figuratively. The hermeneutics to which we subscribe is “literal, grammatical, historical.” This means that we approach a text with the initial assumption that the normal understanding of the word in the time in which the passage was written is to be accepted. Only context would cause one to abandon the literal meaning and recognize a play on words, hidden metaphors, figures of speech, allegories, or analogies.

This comment by Bernard Ramm illustrates the concept:

Ordinarily we think that the word “bear” means an animal in its literal sense; and that a speculator in the stock market who is called a “bear” is a bear by metaphor. But if the population uses the word “bear” three times more frequently for the stock speculator than for the animal then the literal meaning of “bear” is the stock broker.¹

So what is the case in Scripture for the word “star”? It turns out that there are several objects that the word is used to identify in both the Old and New Testaments but regardless of the context there are only three basic subjects (1) Jesus Christ, (2) angels, and (3) celestial objects including stars, planets, and constellations.

II. Uses of “Star” in Scripture:

1. Jesus Christ:

The Lord is identified by the word star in several passages including one of His titles of which there are many. He is called “Alpha and Omega” in Revelation 22:13, the “Anointed One” in Daniel 9:25, the “Branch” in Isaiah 11:1, the “Desire of Nations” in Haggai 2:7, “Emmanuel” in Isaiah 7:14, “Head of the Church” in Ephesians 5:23, “King of the Jews” in Matthew 2:2, the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29, “Lion of the tribe of Judah” in Revelation 5:5, the “Rock” in Isaiah 32:2, “Seed of David” in 2 Timothy 2:8, “Shepherd” in John 10:11, “Scepter out of Israel” in Numbers 24:17, and the “True Vine” in John 15:1.

There are many others but also found among His titles are: the “Star out of Jacob” in Numbers 24:17, the “morning Star” in 2 Peter 1:19, and the “bright morning Star” in Revelation 22:16.

The full title “bright morning Star” is the third of three that He claims in His statement found in:

Revelation 22:16 - “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star.” (NASB)

In this quote the Lord certifies that He is the one who sent the angel whose revelation began in Revelation 21:9. Jesus is the ultimate commander of the entire angelic creation, elect or fallen. No angel, Michael, Gabriel, Lucifer or any of the others can disobey the Lord’s authority with impunity as Lucifer had discovered.

¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 120.

The Lord certifies the veracity of all that the angel communicated and it also includes confirmation of all John has written in the book. This statement therefore validates to the churches the accuracy of the book and the future historicity of its prophecies.

The last sentence is what interests us with regard to our present study. In it the Lord identifies Himself as divine royalty, Jewish royalty, and church royalty.