

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

12-29-24

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker, "Wise men still seek Him?"

Well, I believe that bumper sticker is still true today; wise men and women still do seek Him (Christ Jesus) today!

It is easy to be confused about the chronology of the event surrounding Christ Jesus' birth. While MATTHEW 2: 1, may appear to indicate that King Herald the Great, tried to kill baby Jesus, during Mary's and Joseph's stay in a stable, in Bethlehem, the combined evidence points to a time, one or two years later. In Matthew 2:11, it states that the wise Men saw Jesus, in "A HOUSE", not "A MANGER"; that Jesus was a "YOUNG CHILD" (Strong's Greek word # 3813), in verses 8,9,13,14,20, 21 and not a "BABY" (Strong's Greek word # 1025), as in Luke 2: 12, 16. And that the order by King Herald, to execute all "MALE CHILDREN", "TWO AND UNDER" (Verse 16); By King Herod's, was his estimate of two years or less, of Jesus birth announcement, by the Wise Men. All these things together, seems to suggest, that some time had passed since Jesus' royal birth, in "A MANGER".

So technically, this passage of Scripture is not part of "The Christmas Story" but was the next big important event or day; that happened, in Christ Jesus' early infant life, while He was still very young and has been traditionally added, to the "Nativity Story" but this portion of Scripture, is also a part of the EVIDENCE, of the truthfulness of the historical story of the birth of Christ Jesus.

Matthew 2: 1 - 18 - (Read) - (K.J.B.)

Verse 1 – These "Wise Men" were the priestly caste of the Persians and the Babylonians (Chaldeans) Medes, and others, to the wise men, teachers, and priests; known also as the "Magi" (short for Magicians); and were from "The East" - that is the land east of the land of Judea. Judea, at this time, was a buffer state between the sprawling Roman Empire in the West and the fabulous Persian Empire in the East. War between these two empires, lasted 721 years and was THE WORLD'S LONGEST HUMAN CONFLICT, IN HUMAN HISTORY. This war, between these two empires, was crippling and devastating. The real winners of this conflict between the Romans and the Persians; were the Arabs. Within a few years, both once great empires; were struck, by the onslaught of the Arabs, who inherited the energy that the two powers wasted on the conflict.

"King Herod" ("Herod the Great") was a wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and cleaver enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (Including the Temple, which began in 20 B.C.) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people and in his last years, suffering from an illness, that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of

rage and jealousy and killed people close around him. He had no sooner come to power, than he began by annihilating the Sanhedrin, he slaughtered three hundred court officers, he murdered his wife "Mariamne", his mother "Alexandra", his eldest son "Antipater" and his two sons, "Alexander" and "Ariatobulus". Augustus, the Roman Emperor, at the time of Jesus' birth (LUKE 2:1), said "That it was safer to be Herod's pig, than it was to be Herod's son".

The Persian Empire largely controlled the Silk Route to India and China and the gifts of the Wise Men, were the best that world trade could offer. The Wise Men were about 466 miles inside of the Roman Empire and would have rode horses and would have used camels, for baggage. Also with them, would be crack horse cavalry units (They probably brought a small army with them), for protection.

The Wise Men were experts, in the study of the stars and prophecies that involved astronomical signs, in the sky. The Wise Men; were following a "Star" (Verse 2) which is mentioned in NUMBER 24:17, and is prophesied by an unusual character, named "Balaam". Balaam was some sort of traveling soothsayer and as such, was probably a sort of "Ancestor", to the Babylonian Wise Men, of Daniel's time. Balaam, was based at "Pethor", which is not only near the River Euphrates (Numbers 22:5), but also was close to the city of Babylon. They also probably, were aware of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24 and the Book of Daniel, as a whole; might have come down to them, by tradition, from Jewish captivity in Babylon. The fact that Daniel, was the "Chief Wiseman" and was in charge, over all of the "Wise Men" (Daniel 2:48); about 600 years previous and the impact that Daniel had on the Babylonian Empire and its history; as he served "The Most High God"; probably means, that Daniel's writings, was held in high esteem. Also the prophetic timing, of the "Seventy Weeks" prophecy, from the book of Daniel, would seem to indicate "A Savior" to the world, would be born. If they had known about Micah 5:2, they would have never traveled to Jerusalem, and would have went directly to Bethlehem but it served to fulfill the prophecy in Jeremiah 1:15 (Matthew 2: 17 and 18).

The Wise Men had Daniel's prophecy, indicating when THE TIME of the Messiah's birth and they had the prophecy of Balaam, about the Messiah and HIS STAR.

Both the secular Roman historian, Tacitus (56 A.D. - 120 A.D.) and Suetonius (69 A.D. - 122 A.D.), testify that in the East, at this time, there was a general expectation of a king, of a Messiah or a great man, to be born in Judea, who was to rule the world. A comparable visit, by eastern "Wise Men" (Possibly a follow up), to Nero (Roman Ruler) in 66 A.D., vouches for the reliability of this story. Daniel predicted His coming and then Him being "Cut Off" (His death), to be 483 years (Which it was exactly), after the post Babylonian commandment, to restore Jerusalem Daniel (9:24 - 26). Jesus was born to rule and will do so forever, after His Second Coming; which is also part of the "Nativity Scriptures" and this historical story (Luke 1:32 - 33, as well in John 18:37; Isaiah 9: 6, 7; Revelation 11:15; 22:1-5).

Verse 2 - The Wise Men asks King Herod; "Where is He that is born KING OF THE JEWS"? This part of the "Nativity Story" is recorded in the Book of Matthew and not the Book of Luke because the theme of the Book of Matthew is, that "JESUS IS KING".

Verse 3 - "When Herod, the king had heard these things, he was TROUBLED, and ALL JERUSALEM WITH HIM"; upon hearing what the wise men had said and their presence alone; stirred up the whole city of

Jerusalem. King Herod was troubled because he had already killed off family members, who he feared, might rise up and take his reign, as "KING OF THE JEWS" and Jerusalem, rightly feared, what sort of paranoid outburst might come from Herod upon hearing of a RIVAL king being born, or because of the size and dignity of this caravan from the East.

Verses 4 - 6 – "All the Chief Priests and Scribes" – This was the first contact the religious leaders had with Christ Jesus. "The Chief priests": would especially include those who once held office of High Priest; King Herod changed the High Priest often because it was largely a political appointment. "The Scribes": were the "Teachers of the Law", were experts in the Old Testament and in its many "Oral Jewish Traditions". Their work was not so much making new copies of the Old Testament (As the word "Scribe" suggests) but their main task was teaching the Old Testament. These "Religious Leaders", quoted MICAH 5:2, and understood that the Messiah would be born in "Bethlehem of Judea", distinguishing it from another town of the same name, further to the north but the "Book of Micah" was written in 772 – 722 B.C. and the people in general had forgotten, this remarkable Biblical prophecy! These "Religious Leaders", understood the Biblical information correctly but failed in the application to their lives. Sadly, these experts on "The Word of God"; had the right information but seemed personally uninterested in meeting the promised Messiah for themselves. Had the "Wise Men" met the "Shepherds" of Bethlehem, they would have received better intelligence and information, than they could have learned from the "Religious Leaders" in Jerusalem!

Verses 7 - 8 – King Herod determined from the "Wise Men", about what time the "Star" appeared because King Herod later commanded, that all boys two and younger be killed in the area and we can assume, that was when the "Wise Men" first saw the "Star (The night Jesus was born)" and that it took that long, for the "Wise Men" to travel to Jerusalem. King Herod said "Bring back word to me; that I may come and worship Him also" – King Herod claimed, a desire to "Worship Jesus", when he really wanted to kill Jesus. Notice that, the Scriptures, does not mention, that they promised to return to King Herod, with word, concerning what they found. The "Wise Men" had probably guessed that all this eager desire to see Jesus, was not quite so pure, as it seemed to be (Otherwise, he would have went with them also) and the "Wise Men's" silence, on this matter, did not mean consent, to do so.

Verses 9 - 12 – "Behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them" – The "Star" continued to guide them, apparently re-appearing. We can surmise that the star, appeared some months before, guiding them to the general area, and then they visited Jerusalem, to gain more information. Then the "Star" re-appeared again to specifically guide them. This was an obvious supernatural phenomenon! "They saw the young child with Mary His mother" – We notice that Jesus here is called a "Young Child", likely being 6 – 24 month old and also note that the "Young Child" is mentioned before the "Mother". Notice also, that there is no mention of "Joseph", lest the "Wise Men" should mistake him for the true father of the child. Upon meeting the "Young Child" Jesus, "They opened their treasures, they presented to Him: gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh" – It was common – especially in the "East" – that one would never appear before royalty or a person of importance without BRINGING GIFTS. Considering, that those "Wise Men" believed rightly who this "Young Child" to be, it is not surprising that they gave such lavish gifts. We could say that "Gold", speaks of His "Royalty", that "Frankincense" (Incense) speaks of "His Divinity" and that "Myrrh" speaks of "His death" but probably I

would guess, that they gave these costly gifts, simply to the honor "The King of the Jews". "They presented gifts to Him" – These precious gifts were not PRESENTED to Mary or Joseph, but to Jesus Himself. Yet undeniably, the infant Jesus did not use or spend any of these precious gifts, but His parents used them, hopefully wisely, on His behalf and benefit. In the same way, when we give to Jesus today, we do not give to Jesus directly, but to HIS PEOPLE, WHO USE THOSE GIFTS ON HIS BEHALF AND FOR "HIS KINGDOM'S" BEHALF AND BENEFIT AND HOPEFULLY ALSO WISELY! How useful was these gifts, was to Joseph and his family, in the following months! It helped to defray the costs, of the journey into Egypt and back, as well as the costs of living in Egypt. THE HEAVENLY FATHER KNEW WHAT THOSE NEEDS (COSTS) WERE AND HE MET THEM WITH ANTICIPATION! The "Wise Men" "Fell down and worshipped Him" – More important than these gifts is the fact that they WORSHIPPED JESUS. It must have been a curious sight, to see these impressive foreign dignitaries bowing down (In eastern fashion, bowing on their hands and knees, with their heads, to the ground or floor), before this "Young Child".

*WE SEE HERE, IN THESE SCRIPTURES TODAY, THREE DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO JESUS AND ONE MAY SAY THAT ALL PEOPLE TODAY, RESPOND IN ONE OF THESE THREE WAYS, TO JESUS TODAY:

King Herod – Displayed an open hatred and hostility toward Jesus.

The Chief Priests and Scribes – Were indifferent toward Jesus, all the while retaining their religious respectability.

The "Wise Men" – Sought out Jesus and worshipped Him – even at great cost.

*COMPARING THE VISIT OF THE "WISE MEN", TO THE EARLIER VISIT OF THE "SHEPHERDS (LUKE 2: 15 – 20):

JESUS CAME TO THE JEWS FIRST, THEN TO THE GENTILES.

JESUS CAME TO THE HUMBLE AND LESS INTELLIGENT FIRST THEN THE HONORABLE AND LEARNED.

JESUS CAME TO THE POOR FIRST THEN TO THE RICH.

*WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE "WISE MEN" TODAY:

THEY WERE NOT SATISFIED WITH LOOKING AT THE "STAR" AND ADMIRING IT: THEY DID SOMETHING ABOUT THE "STAR", AND SET OUT AND FOLLOWED AFTER THE "STAR".

THEY WERE NOT DISCOURAGED IN THE SEARCH BY BAD EXAMPLES BY "CLERGY" AND "DOUBIOUS" RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT THE DESTINATION OF THE "STAR" THAT LED THEM, THEY "ENTERED IN".

WHEN THEY ENTERED IN, THEY WORSHIPPED JESUS.

THEY, SENSED AN URGENCY TO WORSHIP AT THE FEET OF JESUS, NOW AND NOT WAIT UNTIL LATTER BECAUSE THEY PROBABLY KNEW, THAT THEY MAY NOT EVER GET THAT OPPORTUNITY AGAIN.

WHEN THEY WORSHIPPED, IT WAS TO GIVE SOMETHING – IT WAS NOT EMPTY HANDED ADORATION.

*WE SEE A WONDERFUL PATTERN IN THE “WISE MEN”:

THOSE WHO LOOK FOR JESUS WILL SEE HIM.

THOSE WHO TRULY SEE HIM WILL WORSHIP HIM.

THOSE WHO WORSHIP HIM; WILL CONSECRATE THEIR SUBSTANCE, TO HIM.

“Being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way” – The worship of the “Wise Men” of Jesus was manifested in OBEDIENCE. They were OBEDIENT TO GOD and this of course made “King Herod (The Government)” MAD!

Verses 13 – 15 – God speaks to Joseph and says “Arise, take the young child and His mother to Egypt” – this command was urgent and came right when the wise men had departed. It would not have sounded completely strange to Joseph, that they should take refuge in EGYPT. There was a large Jewish community in Egypt (A million Jews were in Egypt in A. D. 40). It wasn’t strange that the Holy Spirit would guide Joseph to take the family there. When Joseph “Arose, he took the young child and His mother (Mary) by night” – Joseph’s rapid (Leaving the very night of the dream) and complete obedience is impressive. It is unlikely that Joseph ever imagined such events, when he first was betrothed to Mary of Nazareth. We are not told into what part of Egypt, Joseph and his family went to, nor how long he stayed there: some say six or seven years; others say three or four months but after King Herod ordered the execution of all boys of the age of 2 years old and younger in the area; King Herod died shortly. “Out of Egypt I called my Son” – In the process another prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. At the first glance, we might wonder how this prophecy from HOSEA 11:1 is fulfilled in Jesus. But The Book of Matthew (MATTHEW 2:15) makes it clear that even as Israel as a nation came out of Egypt, so would THE SON OF GOD!

Matthew 2:15 – “And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son”.

Thus, another Old Testament prophecy, became closed with new meaning. God had said through the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt I call my son (HOSEA 11:1). In the original setting, this referred to the to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, at a time of “The Exodus”. But the statement is capable of a double meeting and the Messiah’s history would closely parallel, that of Israel. The prophecy was fulfilled in the life of Christ Jesus, by the return of Jesus’ family, to Israel from Egypt.

When the Lord Jesus physically returns, at his “Second Coming”, to bring judgment upon the nation’s and reign in righteousness, Egypt will be one of the countries, sharing in the blessings of the “Millennial Kingdom” (Isaiah 19:21-25; Zephaniah 39:10; Psalms 68:31). Why should that nation, a traditional enemy of Israel, be so favored? Could it be a token of divine gratitude, for its granting of sanctuary, to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Verses 16 – 18 – “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentations, weeping, and great mourning” – This quotation is from JEREMIAH 31:15, originally referred to the mourning of Israel’s mothers during the conquest and captivity of the nation of Israel. But here “Rachel””, is a representation of Bethlehem’s mothers. “Rachael”, was to the Hebrew’s imagination, as a mother for Israel in all times, sympathetic in all her children’s misfortunes.