

Harmony of the Gospels
Christmas Day 2005
“Wise Men Still Seek Him...”

There is nothing that illustrates the feeling of helplessness in a situation, more than when you are a passenger in an Airplane.

There is just something that make you feel helpless when you are strapped inside a hollow metal tube flying at 400 miles and hour by someone you don't even know...

So, I am going to tell you a couple of stories with airplanes in them, to illustrate my point at the beginning of this Study...

There once was an airliner that had flown into a violent thunderstorm. Everyone inside the plane was terrified that they might be going down at any moment in a raging fireball.

A young lady that had been sitting and talking to a pastor during the flight, turned to him and asked, **“Can't you do something about this?”**

“I'm sorry ma'am,” the pastor said gently, **“I'm in sales, not management.”**

Isaiah 45:6-7

6 ... I am the LORD, and there is no other.

7 I am the one who creates the light and makes the darkness. I am the one who sends good times and bad times. I, the LORD, am the one who does these things.

There are the events of our life that happen to us, that we wonder, **“Is the Lord really in control of everything...why is this happening to me this way, at this time in my life.”**

- ☞ **In the last 2 Sunday mornings**, in our study of the *“Harmony of the 4 Gospels”*, we have taken a look at the lives of Joseph and Mary and looked at how the Lord allowed them to go through some incredibly difficult things, so that Jesus could be born into the world.
- ☞ **Now, If I was bringing Jesus into the world**, I would make things easy for those who were helping me.
- ☞ **I would want them to be totally blessed** and enjoy the whole event.
- ☞ **Well, you can be glad** that I am not the Lord, because His love for you is so great, and His wisdom is so much better than mine, that **He knows that pain in our life causes us to grow**,

And, who says that difficulty in our life is not a joyful event...

- ☞ **“We do”**, you say.
- ☞ **We don’t enjoy life** when people and events in our life hurt, disappoint or are against us.
- ☞ **Joseph and Mary** are just being used by the Lord to bring Jesus into the world, **then why do they have to suffer so much in the process?**
- ☞ **If the Lord is the Pilot** of the plane of their life, why does it always seem like the plane is going down all of the time?
- ☞ **Why does it seem like** the plane of our life is always on a collision course?

A Sunday school teacher was asking her class **who they thought was in control of their lives, and to illustrate** this, she asked the kids to draw a picture and then explain it to the rest of the class...

A little boy by the name of Kyle came up with his drawing and showed it to the Sunday School teacher....

She looked at the picture for a few moments, **It had a n airplane with 4 people on board...**she then asked Kyle what the story represented...

Kyle answered, **“The Flight into Egypt”**, that The Lord was in control over every part of Joseph, Mary and Jesus lives as Jesus was coming into the world and even in protecting him from Herod, wanting to kill Jesus.

“Well go on Kyle, explain the story as you have drawn it here on your paper...”

“Well, here is an airplane with Joseph, Mary and Baby Jesus sitting inside, on their flight to Egypt...”

The teacher said, very good Kyle, but who is that 4th person sitting in the cockpit of the plane?”

“Oh”, Kyle said, **“That is Pontius—The Pilot”**.

As the Christmas story continues this morning, Joseph, Mary and Jesus have come to Bethlehem from Nazareth, and you remember that there was no place for them to spend the night in Bethlehem, except a stable for animals.

- ☞ **When the King of the Universe came to the earth** as a human being, there wasn’t even a hotel room available for Him on the night that He was born...
- ☞ **While in Bethlehem**, Jesus is born, wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in an animal manger.
- ☞ **It is now about a year or more later**, Mary, Joseph and Jesus have made their way back to Jerusalem, and something really incredible begins to happen...

Matthew 2:1-12

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, **wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,**

First of all, notice that it doesn't say that there were 3 men.

- ☞ **There were probably many,** many of these wise men.
- ☞ **They were really Astrologers,** they were men that lived their lives gazing up into the heavens, **studying the stars and the planets.**
- ☞ **These wise men,** were also students of the Old Testament, studying the prophecies that predicted the coming of a great King, that would rule the whole world...
- ☞ **They had read the prophecy** in the book of Micah:

Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.

Then they saw something that happened in the heavens, that led them to believe that this great king described by the prophet Micah, would be arriving now...

Matthew 2

2 The wise men saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? **For we have seen His star in the East** and have come to worship Him.”

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Notice that these men who came from the East had followed a sign in the heavens that they attributed to the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy of the Greatest King the World has ever known...The One who came out of Eternity and became a man...

- ☞ **And notice,** in the tradition of the Male Species, they are Lost...
- ☞ **Did you ever wonder** what would have happened if instead of wise men, they had been **“Wise Women”**?

“They would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought disposable diapers as gifts...”

Why weren't the scribes and the Pharisees interested in the birth of Jesus.

- ☞ **They were supposed to be teachers** of Gods Word to the people.
- ☞ **Therefore they should have been students** of Gods Word themselves.
- ☞ **Therefore they should have know** about the prophecies of Daniel and the coming of the Messiah, and should have been anticipating the coming of the Messiah at any moment..

The coming of the Messiah was not just something limited to Israel, **the whole world knew of this promise**, and they were all waiting and watching, why not the Scribes and Pharisees in Israel?

- ☞ **Daniel chapter 9**, gives us the exact date that Jesus was to come. As Messiah to Jerusalem.

Daniel 9:25

“Know therefore and understand, That **from the going forth of the command** To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (Literally in Hebrew 69 sets of 7 years, or 483 years...)

Genesis 29:27

Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years

When this prophecy was given to Daniel, the entire nation of Israel, , had been overtaken by the Babylonians, and carried back to Babylon where the Lord told Jeremiah the Prophet that they would be there in Babylon for 70 years.

- ☞ **According to this prophecy in Daniel 9**, when a command is given for Israel to be set free from Babylon and be allowed to go back to their own land, that it will be 483 years later that their Messiah will come to Israel.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica on March 14, 445 B. C. King Artaxerxes Longimenes gave this command.

- ☞ **Sir Robert Anderson from England** computed that taking into account all of the changes in the calendar for leap years and the changes from a 360 day year to a 365 day year, that from this command, to the coming of the Messiah, **there would be 173,880 days from march 14, 445 B. C.**

On April 6th, 32 A. D., Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and announced that He was the Messiah, exactly 483 years after Daniel had predicted 700 years before.

These prophecies were widely known at this time, in fact it was the hope of every young girl In Israel, that she would be chosen as “The Virgin” of Isaiah’s prophecy, to bear the Messiah.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, **the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**

- ☞ **That is why the name “Joshua”** was so popular during the time that Joseph and Mary lived.
- ☞ **“Yahushua”, or Joshua** is the Hebrew name for the Greek name “Jesus”.

- ☞ **The name Jesus means** “*The Lord is our Salvation*”.
- ☞ **What did the angel tell Joseph** to name his and Mary’s baby?

Matthew 1:21

And she will bring forth a Son, and **you shall call His name JESUS**, for He will save His people from their sins.

So, the coming of the Messiah, should have also been anticipated by the leaders in Israel, but they had fallen away from the Lord so far, that they were no longer living for His coming.

Matthew 2

5 So they (**The Wise Men**) said to him (**Herod**), “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” (**Micah 5:2**)

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, **the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.**

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

Matthew doesn't say how many wise men came from the east, doesn't mention their names, and doesn't provide any details about how they made their journey.

- ☞ **Over the years**, It has generally been assumed that the wise men (or magi) were three in number because

Matthew 2:11

makes mention of three gifts: “. . . they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.”

- ☞ **But the Bible does not say how many** men there were, the number of wise men is not specified in the Bible.
- ☞ **In some of the Eastern religions** they have claimed up to twelve of them made the journey to Bethlehem.

The names of the wise men, **Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar**, do not come from the Bible and did not appear in Christian literature **until over five hundred years after** the birth of Jesus.

- ☞ **Nothing in the Bible says** the wise men rode camels (or any other animal);
- ☞ **They may** have made their journey from the east on foot for all we know.

- ☞ **And they were most likely** educated men, perhaps astrologers.

However many wise men there were, and however they got to Bethlehem, the Bible tells us they arrived after the birth, probably when Jesus was about a year old... when Joseph, Mary and Jesus were back in Jerusalem, not at the manger scene of Jesus birth.

What was the star, or sign in the heavens that led this entourage of astrologers to believe that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem?

- ☞ **What** did they see?
- ☞ **What were** they following?

Astronomers and others have proposed a variety of objects for the Christmas star —

- ☞ **A Comet**, an exploding star or a grouping of planets.
- ☞ **Some suggest** that the star was a miracle created especially by God.
- ☞ **Such a suggestion** cannot be proved or disproved.

Astronomers today by the use of computer models of the Stars and planets, can go backward and see what the stars and planets looked like 2,000 years ago.

Let's also assume that the Star of Bethlehem could be observed by sky watchers elsewhere in the world, and not just by the Magi, who are known as "wise men" or "kings" but were actually priests who relied on astrology

- ☞ **Between September of 3 B.C. and June of 2 B.C.**, Jupiter passed by the star Regulus in Leo, reversed itself and passed it again, then turned back and passed the star a third time.
- ☞ **This was another remarkable event**, since astrologers considered **Jupiter the king planet and regarded Regulus as the "king star."**

The crowning touch came on June 17, when Jupiter seemed to approach so close to Venus that, without binoculars, they would have looked like a single star.

- ☞ **The whole sequence of events** could have been enough for at least three astrologers to go to Jerusalem and ask Herod: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him."

We are going to look at what I feel is the best theory for what the wise men saw.

- ☞ **What was** the Star of Bethlehem?
- ☞ **Was it** just a legend.
- ☞ **Was it** a Miracle?
- ☞ **Was it a real astronomical event** that actually happened when Jesus was born?

Psalms 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Psalms 36:5

Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens;

Psalms 89:5

And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD;

Proverbs 8:27

When He **prepared** the heavens, I was there

Joel 2:30

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:

What can we assume about the star? (**Slides Start Here**)

- ☞ **It was something new** that had not been seen before.
- ☞ **The wise men saw it** and came from the east.
- ☞ **The star appeared** 2 times.
- ☞ **Was the star one single object**, or 2 or more gathered together?

Dr. Ernest Martin sets the date of Jesus birth at 3 B.C.

- ☞ **We know** that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on April 6th 32 A. D.
- ☞ **We know that Jesus was 33 ½ years old** when He was Crucified.
- ☞ **This makes the year** of Jesus birth 1 or 2 B. C.

Was the event a Comet?

- ☞ **Comets** were thought of as being “Evil”.

Was it a Meteor?

- ☞ **A Meteor cannot linger** over Bethlehem, they are short lived events.

A Supernovae?

- ☞ **This is a possibility**, except that we have no indications from computer models that a supernovae happened during this time.

This leaves only one possibility.

- ☞ **The Magi were probably Babylonian Astrologers** who studied the movements of stars and planets.
- ☞ **If we look at the computer models** for 2-3 B.C., we see that there is a very exciting possibility.

During that time, our computer models show that there was a “**Conjunction**” or “**Joining together**” of a couple large planets that might have looked like one single bright star.

- ☞ **In this next animation**, you will notice that as the earth and other planets orbit the sun, they will sometimes come into alignment together in what is called a “**Conjunction**”.
- ☞ **When this happens** the planets look like they are together, even though they are actually millions of miles apart.
- ☞ **When they align like this**, they form a single bright object in the night sky.

On the morning of Jesus birth, a conjunction or joining together of the large planets Jupiter and Venus took place.

- ☞ **This happened** in the constellation of “**Leo**”.
- ☞ **Leo , you remember** is the sign of the Tribe of Judah, from where the Messiah was predicted to come from.
- ☞ **The Magi**, had their own pagan names for these stars, but **to them it would have been a very important alignment** and said to them that a King, the one predicted in the Hebrew Bible, was about to be born, One who was Eternal.

Because the earth is closer to the Sun than Jupiter and Venus, we are turning faster around the Sun, completing our rotation faster than Jupiter of Venus would.

- ☞ **As we approach and overtake Jupiter**, it looks like it is moving backwards or stopping in the night sky.
- ☞ **The same thing happens** when you are traveling down the freeway and you pass a car.
- ☞ **As you pass the car**, it looks in your rearview mirror, like it is moving backwards against the background, even though both you and the car are still moving forward.
- ☞ **This is called** “*Retrograde Motion*”.

When Jupiter and Venus aligned themselves on the morning of Jesus Birth, they appeared to slow down over Bethlehem, stop and then move again.

- ☞ **Finally, in June of that next year**, about the time that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, Jupiter and Venus came so close together that they looked like one huge bright light in the sky.
- ☞ **This is most likely** what the Magi were seeing.
- ☞ **They saw this alignment** of Venus and Jupiter **as a sign** that the King predicted in Micah, had come.

Matthew 2

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, **the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.**

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

Herod didn't want to worship Jesus, He was in fear that if a new King of the Jews was born, he would lose his title as King of the Jews.

- ☞ **Herod was so paranoid** that someone would take his crown, that he had his wife and some of his sons killed.
- ☞ **It was said of Herod** that *“It is safer to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons”*.

Notice that the star as it is in Retrograde, in verse 9, “Came and Stood still over the place Jesus was born.”

- ☞ **This is a confirmation** that the alignment of Jupiter and Venus happened to cause this brightness.
- ☞ **It wasn't a star**, it was the alignment of two very large planets.
- ☞ **Jupiter is 318 times** the size of the earth.



Interesting that on September 1, 2005, Jupiter and Venus were again very close to each other...Is Jesus about to come to Earth again?

- ☞ **A second shot of Jupiter** and Venus in a conjunction.



Matthew 2

11 And **when they had come into the house**, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Beyond the timing issue, there's another consideration: A comet or supernova big enough to attract the wise men's attention would have been widely noticed by royalty and commoners as well. But King Herod and his advisers seemed not to know or care about the star until the astrologers from the east came to visit.

However, if we suppose that the "star" actually referred to the planets, the situation is less problematic. The movements and groupings of planets in the night sky were of exceeding interest to astrologers and were closely tracked around the world. Historical records and modern-day computer simulations indicate that there was a rare series of planetary groupings, also known as conjunctions, during the years 3 B.C. and 2 B.C.

The show started on the morning of June 12 in 3 B.C., when Venus could be sighted very close to Saturn in the eastern sky. Then there was a spectacular pairing of Venus and Jupiter on Aug. 12 in the constellation Leo, which ancient astrologers associated with the destiny of the Jews.

[More 'Mysteries of the Universe'](#)

Now, this doesn't mean that astrology works. We haven't ruled out other possibilities for the Star of Bethlehem. And the mere existence of interesting celestial events does nothing to prove that the birth of Jesus was accompanied by a star, that the Magi existed, or even that the Nativity took place as described in the Bible.

But it does make our search more rewarding to find a truly interesting astronomical event that happened during the most likely time for the Nativity.

This article is based on John Mosley's 1987 book, "The Christmas Star," which is available from the [Griffith Observatory](#). "The Christmas Star" addresses many other questions about the season, such as: When was Christ born? Who were the Magi? Why is Christmas observed on Dec. 25?

SOMETHING IN THE "NORMAL" NIGHT SKY which was startling when explained. That is the hypothesis for the Star we developed in *Setting the Stage*. Our process of elimination has knocked out meteors, comets and novae as candidates. That leaves *planets*.

Extra Material for this study:

[A Coronation](#)

JUPITER. The name of the greatest god of Roman mythology. And the name of the largest planet of our solar system. Jupiter has been known from ages-old to the present as the King Planet. This greatest of planets is a "gas giant," approximately eleven times the size of Earth and over 300 times more massive. It circles the Sun far beyond Earth, in an orbit of about twelve years duration. In ancient times, planets like Jupiter were considered "wandering stars." Since humans have assigned kingly qualities to this giant wanderer for dozens of centuries, might it have something to do with our Star announcing the birth of a king? That will be our working theory.

It's not enough to have a kingly name and reputation, of course. To be Matthew's Star, Jupiter as viewed from Earth would have to do peculiar things. More precisely, as considered by a magus viewing from the Middle East during the years 3 and 2 BC, Jupiter's movements would have to satisfy all nine identifying characteristics of the Star. In September of 3 BC at the time of the Jewish New Year, Rosh ha-Shanah, Jupiter began to do just that.

A magus watching Jupiter that September saw two objects moving so close that they appeared to touch. This close approach of celestial bodies is sometimes called a 'conjunction.' Our Middle Eastern viewer saw Jupiter coming into a close conjunction with the star, Regulus. Regulus takes its name from the word root which yields our word 'regal.' The Babylonians called Regulus *Sharu*, which means 'king.' The Romans called Regulus *Rex*, which means 'king.' So to start things, at the beginning of the new Jewish year, the Planet of Kings met the Star of Kings. This conjunction may have indicated kingship in a forceful way to a Babylonian magus (satisfying one qualification for the Star), but would it have startled him?

Probably not. Jupiter glides slowly past Regulus about every 12 years. Let's assume our magus enjoyed a 50-year career, say from age 20 to age 70. We don't know how old the Magi were, but if our man was in the second half of his career, he might have seen such a pass two or three times before. Jupiter's orbit wobbles relative to Regulus, so not every conjunction is as close as the one he saw in 3 BC. Perhaps our magus recorded this event with some interest, but it is hard to imagine great excitement. Not from this alone. But, of course, there is more.

The planets move against the field of fixed stars. From Earth, they appear to be "active." For example, were you to watch Jupiter each night for several weeks, you would see that it moves eastward through the starry field. Each night Jupiter rises in the east (satisfying a second Star qualification). Each night it appears to be slightly farther east in the field of fixed stars. All of the planets move like this.

But the wandering stars exhibit another, stranger motion. Periodically, they appear to reverse course and move *backward* through the other stars. This may seem odd, but the reason is simple enough: we watch the planets from a moving platform—Earth—hurtling around the Sun in its own orbit. When you pass a car on the freeway, it *appears* to go backward as it drops behind. For similar reasons, when the Earth in its orbit swings past another planet, that planet appears to move backward against the starry field. Astronomers call this optical effect retrograde motion.

In 3/2 BC, Jupiter's retrograde wandering would have called for our magus' full attention. After Jupiter and Regulus had their kingly encounter, Jupiter continued on its path through the star field. *But then it entered retrograde.* It "changed its mind" and headed back to Regulus for a second conjunction. After this second pass it reversed course again for yet a *third* rendezvous with Regulus, a *triple* conjunction. A triple pass like this is more rare. Over a period of months, our watching magus would have seen the Planet of Kings dance out a halo above the Star of Kings. A coronation.

[The Birth of a King](#)

Jupiter's interesting behavior may explain the kingly aspect of the Star. But there are *nine* qualifications of the Star of Bethlehem. Many are still missing. How did Jupiter's movement relate to the Jewish nation? Is its association with the Jewish New Year enough? Where is an indication of a birth? Some might say that the triple conjunction by itself would indicate to a magus that a new king was on the scene. Maybe. But there is more.

The Jewish nation is composed of twelve ancient tribes. Jewish prophecy states that a particular tribe will bring forth the Messiah: the tribe of Judah. The symbol of Judah's tribe is the lion. You can see these connections in an ancient prediction of Messiah's coming found in the first book of the Bible, the *Book of Genesis*, Chapter 49:

9 You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness-- who dares to rouse him? 10 The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

This association of Messiah with the tribe of Judah and with the lion is a productive clue. It clarifies the connection between Jupiter's behavior and the Jewish nation, because the starry coronation—the triple conjunction—occurred within the constellation of Leo, The Lion. Ancient stargazers, particularly if they were interested in things Jewish, may well have concluded they were seeing signs of a Jewish king. But there is more.

The last book of the New Testament is, in part, a prophetic enigma. But a portion of the *Book of Revelation* provides clear and compelling guidance for our astronomical investigation. The apostle John wrote the book as an old man while in exile on the island of Patmos. Perhaps the austerity of this exile or a lack of companionship left him time to ponder the night sky. Whatever the reason, *Revelation* is full of star imagery. In Chapter 12, John describes a life and death drama played out in the sky: the birth of a king.

1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to

give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre...

A woman in labor, a dragon bent on infanticide and a ruler of the nations. We have already seen this ruler in the *Book of Genesis*, above. This would be the Messiah, in his role as King of Kings. If that interpretation is correct, then according to the gospel story the woman would be Mary, the mother of Jesus. The dragon which waits to kill the child at birth would be Herod, who did that very thing. John says the woman he saw was clothed in the Sun. She had the moon at her feet. What can he be describing? When we continue our study of the sky of September of 3 BC, the mystery of John's vision is unlocked: he is describing more of the starry dance which began with the Jewish New Year.

As Jupiter was beginning the coronation of Regulus, another startling symbol rose in the sky. The constellation which rises in the east behind Leo is Virgo, The Virgin. When Jupiter and Regulus were first meeting, she rose clothed in the Sun. And as John said, the moon was at her feet. It was a new moon, symbolically birthed at the feet of The Virgin.

The sheer concentration of symbolism in the stars at this moment is remarkable. These things could certainly lead our magus to conclude that a Jewish king had been born. But even this is not the whole story. These symbols could indicate a birth, but if they were interpreted to indicate the time of conception, the beginning of a human life, might there be something interesting in the sky nine months later? Indeed. In June of 2 BC, Jupiter continued the pageantry.

[Westward Leading](#)

By the following June, Jupiter had finished crowning Regulus. The Planet of Kings traveled on through the star field toward another spectacular rendezvous, this time with Venus, the Mother Planet. This conjunction was so close and so bright that it is today displayed in hundreds of planetaria around the world by scientists who may know nothing of Messiah. They do it because what Jupiter did makes such a great planetarium show. Jupiter appeared to *join* Venus. The planets could not be distinguished with the naked eye. If our magus had had a telescope, he could have seen that the planets sat one atop the other, like a figure eight. Each contributed its full brightness to what became the most brilliant star our man had ever seen. Jupiter completed this step of the starry dance as it was setting in the west. That evening, our Babylonian magus would have seen the spectacle of his career while facing toward Judea.

No one alive had ever seen such a conjunction. If the Magi only began their travel plans in September, when they saw this sight nine months later, someone may have shouted "What are we waiting for? Mount up!" At the end of their travel, which may have taken weeks or months, these experts arrived in Jerusalem. They told their tale, and "all Jerusalem was disturbed." Herod wanted to know two things: when the Star had appeared, and where this baby was. The Magi presumably described the timing of events starting in September of 3 BC and continuing through June of 2 BC. Herod sent them to Bethlehem in search of the child with orders that they return to tell where he was.

To qualify as the Star, Jupiter would have to have been ahead of the Magi as they trekked South from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Sure enough, in December of 2 BC if the Magi looked south in the wee hours, there hung the Planet of Kings over the city of Messiah's birth.

All but one of the nine Biblical qualifications for the Star have now been plausibly satisfied:

- 1 The first conjunction signified birth by its association to the day with Virgo "birthing" the new moon. Some might argue that the unusual triple conjunction by itself could be taken to indicate a new king.
- 2 The Planet of King's coronation of the Star of Kings signified kingship.
- 3 The triple conjunction began with the Jewish New Year and took place within Leo, showing a connection with the Jewish tribe of Judah (and prophecies of the Jewish Messiah).
- 4 Jupiter rises in the east.
- 5 The conjunctions appeared at precise, identifiable times.
- 6 Herod was unaware of these things; they were astronomical events which had significance only when explained by experts.
- 7 The events took place over a span of time sufficient for the Magi to see them both from the East and upon their arrival in Jerusalem.
- 8 Jupiter was ahead of the Magi as they traveled south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

But the ninth qualification would require that Jupiter stop over Bethlehem. *How* could a planet do that? And *did* Jupiter do it?

[To Stop a Star](#)

The problem with a planet stopping is not what you might think. The problem is not that planets can't stop. Just the opposite. The problem is that all planets are *always* stopped to the eye of a human observer. The sky moves above Earth at half the speed of the hour hand on a common clock. Its movement is imperceptible to the naked eye. So, if all stars are always stopped, what can Matthew have meant?

Perhaps you have already anticipated the key to this final mystery: retrograde motion. An astronomer tracking the movement of planets through the star field watches not so much on the scale of minutes, but on the longer scale of days, weeks and months. On this scale of time, Jupiter did stop. On December 25 of 2 BC as it entered retrograde, Jupiter reached full stop in its travel through the fixed stars. Magi viewing from Jerusalem would have seen it stopped in the sky above the little town of Bethlehem.

THERE IS YET MORE TO THE DANCE—THERE IS AN ENDING. And not a pleasant one. If Biblical clues have led us to the sky of Messiah's birth, they now lead to a celestial dirge floating over Jerusalem. The bookends of a life. If the Almighty did orchestrate these signs of Messiah's coming and those at his death, then we are seeing more than stars in the skies. We are seeing a poetry of terrible beauty, of silent awe...

[Dating the Crucifixion](#)

Yes, there is more in the sky which declares "Messiah has come." But to see these things, we must know when to look up. Peter used the sky as a proof that Messiah had come, but *which* sky did he use? A body of scholarly work addresses the date of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. This body of work, together with Roman and Jewish histories, archaeoastronomy and the words of the Bible allow us to identify the day and almost the moment of his death. That is an extraordinary claim. You must judge it for yourself. Consider the evidence.

What can we learn from the Jewish calendar? Quite a lot, if we assemble the puzzle pieces. By law and custom, the Jewish people of Jesus' day took the Sabbath as a day of complete rest (1). Because no work could be done on the Sabbath, which we call Saturday, Friday came to be known as Preparation Day (2). It was a day when food and other things needed for Saturday were prepared in advance. This is our first clue to the date of the crucifixion, because all four Gospels state that Jesus was crucified on Preparation Day, a Friday (3). This is also the common consensus of the Church Fathers and scholars throughout church history (4).

The Gospels also record that the crucifixion occurred the day before the Passover festival (5). This is a second important clue, because it gives us a solid connection with the ancient Jewish calendar system. Passover always begins on the 14th day of the Jewish lunar month of Nisan. (Nisan 14 is in the Spring, which is why Easter is celebrated then). By Judean tradition, Passover begins at twilight, the dividing line between Nisan 14 and 15 (6).

On the Jewish calendar (and on ours) a numbered day of the month may fall on any day of the week. For example, in one year your birthday might fall on Tuesday, in the next year it might fall on Thursday. This "float" among days of the week is why this second clue is so powerful. Putting these two Biblical puzzle pieces together, we see that the crucifixion must have occurred in a year when Nisan 14 happened to fall on a Friday, Preparation Day. That narrows things down considerably.

The Year. Ancient non-Biblical historians record that Jesus was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate (7). Pilate was Roman procurator of Judea during the years 26 AD through 36 AD (8). This limits our search for a date to those years. In "Setting the Stage" we found that Jesus was born in 3/2 BC. And there are also important Biblical clues: the *Book of Luke* records that Jesus began his public ministry when he "was about 30 years old" (9), and the *Book of John* records three annual Passovers during Jesus' ministry (10). Taken together, these puzzle pieces add to a crucifixion date in the early 30's, AD. During those years, Nisan 14 fell on a Friday, Preparation Day, twice: on April 7 of 30 AD and April 3 of 33 AD (11). To help us choose between those two dates, there is ample and fascinating evidence.

[Pilate and Sejanus](#)

The next clue comes from a surprising source: a dark tale of intrigue, hidden violence and vicious revenge in Rome. We go to the Imperial court...

By the time Tiberius Caesar (42 BC - 37 AD) reached his mid-sixties, he had wearied of daily Imperial duties. He entered semi-retirement on the Island of Capri in 26 AD. There, out of the public eye, he embraced a life of unmentionable depravity and cruelty. Still, even for a degraded and absentee emperor there were the problems of government. As his personal conduit for management of Rome from Capri, Tiberius left a regent in the capitol. This was Aelius Sejanus, who had been captain of the Praetorian Guard. Sejanus had shown himself to be politically capable and apparently loyal to Tiberius, but he was a cunning and ruthless man.

During the 5 years that Sejanus administered the Empire, he artfully engineered the banishment, imprisonment, suicide or other elimination of many of his own opponents and Tiberius' potential successors. As chronicled extensively by the Roman historian Tacitus ([12](#)), Sejanus apparently expected that he might one day plot and murder his way to the throne. He very nearly did. Unfortunately for Sejanus, Tiberius had a trusted sister-in-law, Antonia. She was not a political player, which gave her opinions a certain weight. While nearly all communication from Rome filtered through Sejanus, Antonia managed to place a secret letter before Tiberius in which she described Sejanus' web of plots in convincing detail.

Tiberius responded by plotting his own surprise. He sent an emissary with a lengthy letter to be read before the Roman Senate with Sejanus present. In the turnabout ending of the missive, Tiberius loosed a scathing denunciation of Sejanus and demanded his arrest. The shocked mastermind was dragged out and executed the same day: October 18, 31 AD.

Why does this date matter? Because Roman and Biblical history intersect. During his glory days, Sejanus first influenced and then himself made appointments of many Imperial officials, including one Pontius Pilate. Pilate was made Prefect of Judea about the time that Tiberius gave up Rome for Capri. Sejanus was a notorious anti-Semite ([13](#)), and Pilate followed his benefactor's anti-Jewish policies as he governed Judea. A few examples will illustrate Pilate's treatment of the Jews.

The Romans were well aware that the Jews shunned all graven images. Tacitus, though himself disdainful of Jewry ([14](#)), accurately comments in *The Histories*, Book V:

"...the Jews have purely mental conceptions of Deity, as one in essence. They call those profane who make representations of God in human shape out of perishable materials. They believe that Being to be supreme and eternal, neither capable of representation, nor of decay. They therefore do not allow any images to stand in their cities, much less in their temples."

Of course, this rejection of graven images comes from the Ten Commandments, recorded in the *Book of Exodus*, Chapter 20:

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God..."

Knowing this, Pilate proceeded to install images of Tiberius in the Jewish temple at Jerusalem, a massive offense. From Josephus, *Wars*, Book II, Chapter 9:

"Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. This excited a very great

tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. These came zealously to Pilate to Cesarea, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem, and to preserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights. On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open market-place, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords. Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed."

Other examples of Pilate's intentional mistreatment of the Jews have come down to us in ancient histories. Philo reports that Pilate also proposed to set up a colossal idol in the holy of holies itself, the most sacred part of the temple at Jerusalem (15). Josephus reports that Pilate seized religious offerings made by worshipping Jews to pay for Roman work projects (16). The *Book of Luke* tells us that Pilate killed Jewish worshipers, mingling his victims' blood with that of their religious sacrifices, a hideous desecration (17). And at the crucifixion, Pilate posted a notice on Christ's cross which declared him "The King of the Jews," thereby mocking the Jewish leadership even as he gave them their way (18).

But all this raises a large question about the execution of Jesus. Pilate's pattern was to avoid doing "anything which could be acceptable to his subjects" the Jews (19). So, why would he now give in to the clamor against Jesus? Why not release Jesus, if only to irritate the priests who called for his death? The Biblical record does reflect Pilate's intention to release Jesus, and that he almost did. But something had changed. Something made Pilate respond to the Jewish leaders, grudgingly, rather than treat them with his customary vicious disdain.

What had changed was Sejanus. He was dead. Even worse for Pilate, after the surprise execution in the Fall of 31 AD, Tiberius began to root out Sejanus's appointees and allies. Many were tried, tortured at length and executed in ways designed to maximize terror. In *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius*, Suetonius describes treatment of Sejanus' allies with tortures unmentionable here. One of the milder descriptions from LXII:

"At Capri they still point out the scene of his executions, from which he used to order that those who had been condemned after long and exquisite tortures be cast headlong into the sea before his eyes, while a band of marines waited below for the bodies and broke their bones with boathooks and oars, to prevent any breath of life from remaining in them."

Tacitus records in *The Annals*, Book V:

"Executions were now a stimulus to [Tiberius'] fury, and he ordered the death of all who were lying in prison under accusation of complicity with Sejanus. There lay, singly or in heaps, the unnumbered dead, of every age and sex, the illustrious with the obscure. Kinsfolk and friends were not allowed to be near them, to weep over them, or even to gaze on them too long. Spies were set round them, who noted the sorrow of each mourner and followed the rotting corpses, till they were dragged to the Tiber, where, floating or driven on the bank, no one dared to burn or to touch them. The force of terror had utterly extinguished the sense of human fellowship, and, with the growth of cruelty, pity was thrust aside."

Tiberius also issued countermands to Sejanus' orders and policies, including his anti-Semitic policies. The new official line was to "let the Jews alone" ([20](#)). But this was not a casual change of direction. The new mandate arrived amidst the vigorous extermination of many officials Sejanus had put in place. *Officials like Pilate.*

After October 18, 31 AD, Pilate lived in a lethal political context. If Jesus' "trial" happened after this date, Pilate's strange ambivalence toward Jesus and the Jewish leadership is not strange after all—at this moment of history, his prejudices could cost him his life. Knowing this context, we can also understand why Pilate would genuinely dread the chant of those Jews who demanded Christ's execution. The *Book of John*, Chapter 19:

12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. "

[Daniel's Prophecy](#)

It's becoming more clear that April 3, 33 AD is our date. An ancient and startling Jewish prophecy of the Messiah adds more evidence.

Centuries before the birth of Christ, a young Jew was taken prisoner. He was abducted from his homeland and all that he had known. Perhaps he went along stumbling, bloody-footed with other prisoners. More likely, he rode a camel or cart because of his high birth. History does not say. He journeyed months from Judea, which he would never again see. But, when uprooted from everything familiar, this young man did not forget. According to the Bible, he did not lose faith in his god. His name was Daniel.

It was 605 BC. The tiny state of Judah was overrun by the great army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Judah had taken the wrong side in a regional conflict between Egypt and Babylon, and it paid the price ([21](#)). To insure its submission as a vassal state, many from Judah's royal and aristocratic families were carried away in what is sometimes called the first Babylonian captivity. Daniel was among these.

The Bible records that Daniel was groomed for service in Nebuchadnezzar's court. He learned the Babylonian language, literature and customs. With time, he became a trusted advisor to the king, more accomplished than all the other royal advisors. The Bible says that his true strength was in his faith and his god, not his personal ability.

Though his success in the king's court was remarkable, and though he never returned to his homeland, still his heart must have remained in the land of his birth. The Bible records his prayers—heartcries, really. Pleas of such passion that there must have been tears on his face (22). Daniel pleaded with God for his people, that their captivity might end, that the temple at Jerusalem might be rebuilt.

The Bible records that during such a time of passion, Daniel had a vision. The angel Gabriel appeared to him and spoke. The *Book of Daniel*, Chapter 9:

"21 while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 23 As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed...

...

25 "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven `sevens', and sixty-two `sevens'... 26 After the sixty-two `sevens', the Anointed One will be cut off..."

The word "Christ" means "anointed one." For this and other reasons, most commentators conclude that Daniel received a prediction of Messiah's coming. More than that, Daniel was told the *date* of Messiah's death, the date he would be "cut off." That's the date we seek for our astronomical investigation. So, can the numeric symbolism of Daniel's "sevens" be deciphered? Perhaps it is not terribly complicated.

Taking a direct approach, let us assume that the "sevens" are seven years. Gabriel told Daniel that after the decree to rebuild, there would be "seven sevens" (which is 49), plus "sixty-two sevens" (which is 434). After these 483 years, the Anointed One would be cut off. If the prophecy is true, this would be the year of the crucifixion.

Remember that in ancient times, our modern calendar system was not in use. In other prophetic passages a year of 360 days is used (23). To convert to our modern system which uses the longer solar year, we must divide by the time it takes for Earth to orbit the Sun, which is 365.24 days. This yields 476 years on our calendar (24).

We now have a number of years, but when do we start the countdown? Gabriel said to count "[f]rom the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." When was that? The prophet Nehemiah records such a decree, and he dates it as the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (25). On our calendar, that date is 444 BC (26). Counting 476 years from 444 BC, and remembering that there is no year numbered "zero" AD, we discover what Gabriel told Daniel: the Messiah would be cut off in 33 AD.

This stunning prophecy, made over 500 years before Christ was born, is consistent with all of the other evidence we have seen. So, we have increasing confidence that Jesus was crucified on April 3, 33 AD. But the "clincher," perhaps the most powerful evidence, is astronomical. Let's consider Peter's argument.

Peter's Argument

We now leap beyond the crucifixion to add a last piece of evidence about the day of the cross. The Bible reports that the resurrected Messiah instructed his disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit. They may have been confused, wondering if Jesus was talking about something political (27). But stay they did.

They were still there for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover Feast and the crucifixion. Jerusalem was full of worshipers from all over the Near East. The Bible reports sudden startling events during this celebration: the sound of a great rushing wind, something like flames hovering about the disciples. Just as strange, the disciples began to speak, but not in their native Aramaic or Hebrew. They spoke in languages they had not learned. They were understood by countless foreign visitors to the city (28).

There was pandemonium. A boisterous crowd jostled closer. Travelers heard their own languages spoken by Galileans and were bewildered. Hecklers shouted: "They're all drunk!" The apostle Peter jumped up amid the confusion. We can imagine his hand outstretched to still the crowd. He then boomed out his explanation of what was happening. Listen and consider as Peter argues from the words of the prophet Joel recorded circa 835 BC. From the *Book of Acts*, Chapter 2:

"14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Then Peter delivered the knockout punch. The *Book of Acts*, Chapter 2:

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

Peter asserts that Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled *and that his listeners know it*—that they have seen the signs themselves. This is the same argument the apostle Paul made, as discussed in "Setting the Stage" on this web site. This argument would have had exactly **no** persuasive force unless Paul's and Peter's audiences knew that signs had occurred. Both men assumed that everybody knew about the signs. That's powerful evidence that they had occurred. Of particular interest for us: Joel said there would be astronomical signs. And now Peter says, "you've seen them." What were they?

"The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood..." The gospels do recount that the sun was darkened on the day of the crucifixion from noon until 3 in the afternoon (29). Ancient non-Biblical sources confirm this. Phlegon Trallianus records in his history, *Olympiades* (41):

"In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [AD 32-33], a failure of the Sun took place greater than any previously known, and night came on at the sixth hour of the day [noon], so that stars actually appeared in the sky; and a great earthquake took place in Bithynia and overthrew the greater part of Niceaea." (42)

But what about the bloody moon?

[The Celestial Dirge](#)

The answer to that question fixes the date of the crucifixion with precision. Beyond reasonable doubt, in fact, because a "blood moon" has a specific meaning. In ancient literature, not only the Bible, it means a lunar eclipse. Why bloody? Because when the moon is in eclipse it is in the Earth's shadow. It receives no direct light from the sun, but is lit only by the dim light refracted and red-shifted by the Earth's atmosphere. The moon in eclipse does glow a dull red, as you know if you have seen it.

This matters, because with Kepler's equations we can determine exactly when historical eclipses occurred. Perhaps it will not surprise you to learn that only one Passover lunar eclipse was visible from Jerusalem while Pilate was in office (30). It occurred on April 3, 33 AD, the **Day of the Cross**.

That day followed a night of horrors predicted by the prophet Isaiah. In place of sleep for Jesus there were torch-lit hours of interrogation and mockery, spittle in the face and beatings, barbed lashes tearing flesh from his back and thorns pressed into his scalp. Isaiah wrote that the messiah would be beaten until "marred beyond human likeness" (31). And so, Jesus was brutalized during multiple "trials" and retrials before priests Annas and Caiaphas (32), King Herod (33) and Roman prefect Pontius Pilate (34). In the end, his fate was decided by a mob (35). He was marched to Golgotha, the "place of the skull," and crucified. He would die within six hours.

The gospels tell the chronology. Hammers thudded spikes through Jesus and into the cross at 9 AM (36). He was raised up. At noon and for three hours the sky was darkened (29). In the Temple at Jerusalem, only priests were permitted to enter the presence of God—a thick curtain excluded common men. During the crucifixion, this veil was torn apart, top to bottom, as a shattering earthquake split rocks and broke open tombs (37). In the darkness and tumult of these signs, even the Roman guards regreted their part in the killing (38). Jesus died at 3 PM (39). He was removed from the cross before nightfall to preserve the sanctity of the impending Passover (40). But the signs and wonders did not end. When the moon rose that evening, it was blood red. We can imagine the wonder of those who were present through all of this, and their increasing dread as the signs kept coming.

But there is more which they could *not* see. Kepler's equations indicate that the moon rose already in eclipse, already bloody, fulfilling Joel's vision. Necessarily, this means that the eclipse

commenced *before* moonrise. With software we can look below the horizon and see Earth's shadow begin the eclipse. When we do, we find that at 3 PM, as Jesus was breathing his last on the cross, the moon was going to blood.

The sky at Christ's **birth** can be viewed as a kind of visual poetry, with the new moon symbolically "birthed" at the foot of Virgo, the virgin. To complete that celestial poem, on the night of Jesus' **death** the moon had returned to the foot of the virgin. But now it was a full moon. A life fully lived, blotted out in blood.

KING DAVID SAID "THE STARS SPEAK." The starry events you have seen match the 9-point account in *The Book of Matthew*. A reasonable person could conclude that we have found the Biblical Star. If we have, then you have heard the stars speak. You have heard the celestial fanfare for the birth of a King. The Messiah. You have heard the hushed celestial dirge played out in the sky at his crucifixion. But, what do these things mean?

[The Fuller Message](#)

The Bible says the stars can carry messages from God on high. If that is true, then behind any other message, the fundamental meaning of these events is that God is there. The stars were part of his communication to those living in the Magi's day. Through our understanding of what happened in the sky, he continues to speak to us today.

When God called Moses into closer relationship with himself, he used a startling event in the natural world. A bush burned, but it was not consumed by the flames. The burning bush was God's invitation to Moses, an invitation to draw near and to hear a fuller message. When the Magi saw signs in the heavens, they responded as did Moses. They drew near to learn more. The Star of Bethlehem is an invitation for people who see it today, including you. A natural response when you see a sign is to draw near. To want to know more. To seek the fuller message.

Most people believe there is a God. Christians, Jews, and those of countless other religious traditions believe that we were created for relationship with our Creator. That is probably why the idea of having a relationship with God sounds attractive to most of us. We're simply built that way. As French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote:

There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator made known through Jesus Christ.

This religious impulse is durable. History shows that even relentless brutal repression of religious expression cannot drive out human interest in The Existing One. Still, according to the Bible there is a disconnection between God and man. We are interested in God, yes, but we are much *more* interested in ourselves—this is the heart of what the Bible calls "sin." The Jewish prophet Isaiah describes our sinful self-centeredness this way in the *Book of Isaiah*, Chapter 53:

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...

The Bible says that spiritual death, separation from God, is the payment we receive for sin. The Apostle Paul says in the *Book of Romans*, Chapter 6:

23 For the wages of sin is death...

But if God did create us for relationship with himself, surely he would also provide a way to come into this relationship, to overcome the problem of sin and the spiritual death it brings. The fuller message of the Star of Bethlehem is that he **has** provided that way. He has provided the Messiah, the Christ. Both Old and New Testaments of the Bible say that this Messiah will willingly accept the punishment for sin in our place. This is God's provision to heal our separation from him.

Both of the two verses above state our human spiritual problem—the bad news. But the quotations are incomplete. The verses continue and state the solution to the problem—the good news. They go on to say that the Messiah will bear the punishment for our sin, that we can have relationship with God because of what the Messiah did. Here are the complete verses, with both the bad news and the good. They say God has made a way:

Isaiah 53.6: We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him [the Messiah] the iniquity of us all.

Romans 6.23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So the fuller message of the Star is good news. That Christ, the Messiah has come. The Messiah has paid the penalty for our sins. It is possible to have the relationship with God that so many desire. There have probably been times when you have thought about God and the possibility of knowing him. That is true of most of us.

A man found the girl of his dreams. She was intelligent, beautiful, and she loved him. He was convinced that she was the perfect mate. He wanted to marry her. But he never asked her. So, they were never married. Wanting to be married doesn't make it so. You have to decide and then act.

Our situation with God is something like that. We feel the God-shaped vacuum. We desire relationship with him. We hear that Christ's sacrifice makes that relationship possible by paying the price for our wrongdoing.

But the relationship will never happen unless we decide and then act.

Jesus said in the *Book of Revelation*, Chapter 3:

20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Through Jesus the Christ, God is inviting you into relationship. But you must decide and act. If you accept the invitation, Jesus promises to come and be with you. If you feel God calling you into relationship, you need to decide and to act. You can do this by praying to God right now. Prayer is just talking to God. The exact words you use are not important. God looks at the heart. You can begin your new relationship with God by praying a prayer like this one:

God, I want to come into relationship with you. I know that I am not perfect, that I'm a sinner in your eyes. Thank you that you sent Jesus to die in my place, to take

the punishment for my sinfulness. Come into my life, Lord. Begin making me the person you designed me to be. Amen.

If you have just prayed this prayer, please [email](mailto:rob@teachtheword.com) us right now at rob@teachtheword.com, so that we can send you information which will help you in your new relationship with God.

[A Clockwork Star](#)

But the Star means yet more. Jesus said in the *Book of Matthew*, Chapter 10:
30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Many have marveled at Jesus' statement—that God's "mind" is so great that it allows his complete familiarity with the creation in all of its detail. We can barely begin to contemplate it. But confronting the Star, we see the same message.

For if the Star wasn't magic or a special miracle from outside of the natural order, then it was something even more startling. It was a **Clockwork Star**. And that is overwhelming. The movement of the heavenly bodies is regular, like a great clock. The **Clockwork Star** finally means that from the very instant at which God flung the universe into existence, he also knew the moment he would enter human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He marked it in the stars. And from before the beginning of time as we experience it, God knew the very moment when Messiah would breath his last on the cross.

Jesus is "**the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.**"
Revelation 13:8

Accept the invitation. Decide, and act.

CHRISTMAS OR CHANUKAH?

By James Scott Trimm

CHRIST'S MASS

The word Christmas is a shortened form of "Christ's Mass". The word "Mass" is a Latin word meaning "offering". Thus "Christ's Mass" literally means "Messiah's Offering". Messiah's offering was of course his crucifixion, not his birth. When a person says "Merry Christmas" they are actually saying "Merry Crucifixion of Messiah." Moreover Christians observe "Christmas" (Messiah's Offering) once a year. However the Scriptures tell us that Messiah was offered once for all time and is not offered again and again once a year (Hebrews 10:1-4, 10-14). An annual "Christ's Mass" is therefore clearly unscriptural.

JESUS' BIRTHDAY?

Once upon a time, a perfect man and a perfect woman met. After a perfect courtship, they had a perfect wedding. Their life was, of course "perfect."

One snowy, stormy Christmas Eve, this perfect couple was driving their perfect car (a SUV) along a winding road, when they noticed someone at the side of the road in distress. Being the perfect couple they stopped to help.

There stood Santa Claus with a huge bundle of toys. Not wanting to disappoint any children on the eve of Christmas, the perfect couple loaded Santa and his toys into their vehicle. Soon they were driving along delivering the toys.

Unfortunately, the driving conditions deteriorated and the perfect couple and Santa Claus had an accident. Only one of them survived the accident.

Who was the survivor?

The perfect woman survived. She's the only one who really existed in the first place. Everyone knows there is no Santa Claus and there is no such thing as a perfect man.

So, if there is no perfect man and no Santa Claus, the perfect woman must have been driving. This explains why there was an accident.