

The Magi's Résumé: Fluent in Parthian, Aramaic, & Koine Greek, Experts in Astronomy & the Use of Quadratic Equations to Predict Recurring Celestial Events; Magi's Use of "Aster" Is to Be Taken Literally; Astrology Is Not Astronomy: Astrology Condemned by God, Deut 18:10-14; Astronomy Created by God for Signs and Seasons, Gen 1:14-15

IV. The Magi's Résumé:

Further consideration needs to be given to those whose testimony introduces us to the star in Matthew 2. A biographical sketch of these men reveals that their expertise in the science of astronomy means that their use of the word *astēr* is to be taken literally not figuratively.

Remember that due to the influence of Alexander the Great, the Persians had become Hellenized to a great degree and that Greek had influenced their culture including their language. Greek served as the official written language on coins and elsewhere, and surely there were many educated Parthians who used conversational Greek. We know Greek drama was cultivated, not only from the classical sources, but from excavations of theaters.

The Parthians were also familiar with Aramaic which is close to the Hebrew language as is evidenced by its use in the Old Testament:

Monuments inscribed in Aramaic extend into the Persian Period, when Aramaic became the lingua franca of all Southwest Asia as the result of the traffic of Aramaean merchants; business documents, weights, measures, etc. are found in Aramaic dating in the 8th to the 5th century B.C. Our Lord spoke Galilean Aramaic, and Aramaic portions of the Old Testament include Daniel 2:4-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Jeremiah 10:11.¹

Since the Magi were members of the upper house of the Parthian Senate and therefore among the educated elite, we are able to conclude that they spoke Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Persian Period, as well as Greek which was the official written language of Parthia. Keep in mind also that many of the Magi were Jews quite familiar with Old Testament Scripture and, therefore, fluent in Hebrew as well.

In addition, these men's areas of expertise influenced their choice of words in their conversation with Herod:

It is universally accepted that the wise men were Magi, astronomers from what was at one time the Babylonian and Persian Empires. These were educated men, learned not only in the movement of the stars and constellations, but also masters of mathematics. These men not only studied the sky but were quite capable of calculating the occurrence of eclipses, conjunctions of planets, and the movements of stars. (pp. 53-54)

At the time of the birth of Jesus, astronomy was already four thousand years old. The study of the heavens and the stars was probably one of the first interests of the ancient civilizations.

No doubt the first discovery made by ancient astronomers was that most of the stars moved about the sky in fixed formations which we call constellations. Some of these formations seemed to circle around a fixed point in the north. Another discovery was that there were five stars which moved very rapidly across the sky. It would be learned much later that these were not stars at all, but planets. These "moving stars" would be assigned very special meanings by the ancient astronomers.

¹ Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, 3d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 77.

Clay tablets from Sumerian and Babylonian archaeological sites containing the astronomical records dating to the second millennium B.C. prove that these early astronomers were surprisingly advanced. They had divided the constellations, which seem to revolve around the north pole, into the twelve signs of the Zodiac which are known today. Their mathematical ability was amazing and they divided the circle of the sky into “houses” for the twelve Zodiac signs, each measuring twelve *ammat*, or 30 degrees. (p. 54)

By 500 B.C. they had mastered quadratic equations and had developed astronomical tables which could predict eclipses of the sun and moon, conjunctions of planets, and many other features which modern day astronomers calculate.² (pp. 54–55)

What we are able to conclude from this background information on the languages spoken in Parthia and the advanced education of the Magi is that when they related to Herod what they had seen in the east their use of the word *astēr* was, to paraphrase Hamm, “the word used in their ordinary conversation.” These men chose the word whose meaning was what they intended in their everyday use of it: a heavenly body that includes the stars, planets, and constellations.

V. Astrology Is Not Astronomy:

The question now arises as to what star they were referring to when they spoke of it as “His star” in Matthew 2:2.

This will take us into a study of the various applications of the word *astēr*. This requires a disclaimer: we are not going to study the Zodiac and all that is associated with the satanic imitation of the science of astronomy. Astrology is a study of the stars, planets, and constellations with the belief that they hold the fate of individuals. It is a form of divination:

The art of obtaining secret knowledge, especially of the future, is a pagan counterpart of prophecy. Careful comparison of Scripture will reveal that inspirational divination is by demon power, whereas genuine prophecy is by the Spirit of God. The Biblical attitude toward divination is distinctly hostile:

Deuteronomy 18:10 - There must never be found among you anyone who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire [human sacrifice], anyone who practices divination [**קִסָּם** **קִסָּם** *qesem qasam*: a means employed to determine the future or the outcome of events by observation of various omens and signs.], a soothsayer, an augurer, a sorcerer,

v. 11 - one who casts spells, one who consults a ghost, a practitioner of the occult, or a necromancer.

v. 12 - Whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord and because of these things the Lord your God will expel them before you.³

Seeking knowledge of the future from any other source than the God of Israel was an insult to His holy Being and the revelation of Himself and His purpose for men.⁴

² Robert W. Faid, “The Star of Bethlehem! What Was It?” in *A Scientific Approach to Biblical Mysteries* (New York: Guideposts, 1993), 53–55.

³ *The NET Bible* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 408.

⁴ Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 271.

Every aspect of divine revelation has come under counterattack by the Dark Side. What God proposes, Lucifer opposes. He has a system of counterfeits that try to imitate the legitimate functions of the spiritual life of every dispensation.

According to Paul, those in reversionism have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator” (NET).

A branch of divination is astrology and its evil is to assign to celestial bodies the power to control the lives of men rather than man’s observance of them for signs.

Genesis 1:14 - Then God said, “Let there be lights [מָאֹר *ma’or*] in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night and let them be for signs [אוֹת *’oth*] and for seasons and for days and years;

v. 15 - and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so.

Ma’or refers to lightbearers: sun, moon, stars, planets, comets, asteroids. Since these luminaries were included in “the heavens” created in verse one, the reference in verses 14–15 is to the restoration of light to these heavenly bodies.

The lightbearers were to designate signs [אוֹת *’oth*], seasons, days, and years. The Hebrew *’oth* means a “sign, ensign, flag, token, or monument.” These lightbearers display god’s workmanship (Psalm 19:1); have been used by God to reveal the “signs of the times” such as the birth of Christ (Matthew 2:2; cf., Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25; Jeremiah 10:2; Joel 2:30); and are used by man to predict changes in the weather (Matthew 16:1–4). These signs are not to be construed as astrological signs of the zodiac.⁵ (pp. 20–21)

With regard to the satanic counterfeit of astronomy we turn to Merrill F. Unger for comments on astrology. He will reference two major passages of Scripture which must be noted before proceeding, first Amos 5:25–26, then Acts 7:41–43.

⁵ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Creation, Chaos, and Restoration*, 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1995), 20–21.