

Larson Works from the Basis of a 1 B.C. Death of Herod & Use of Starry Night Pro to Search the Skies of 3 & 2 B.C.; The Magi Were from the Parthian Not Persian Empire; Herod & the Jews Had Eyes to See but Could Not See, Acts 28:26; John 12:40; Isa 6:9; the Starry Testimony, Ps 19:1-4 Retrograde Motion & Retrogradation

Larson's approach for identifying the Star of Bethlehem is completely different than those writers we have already observed. Duane Spencer, Steven Collins, Robert Faid, and Joseph Seiss each assumed that Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. This caused them to search for celestial phenomena, as far back as 7 B.C., that they thought unusual enough to be considered "His star."

As we have noted, Finegan supported this same belief in the first edition of his book, published in 1964. The major source that supported the 4 B.C. death of Herod was Flavius Josephus's *Antiquity of the Jews* which we have just noted.

Larson's analysis capitalizes on two things: (1) Jack Finegan's 1998 revision of his *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* in which he places the death of Herod in 1 B.C. and (2) the availability of a computer program¹ that enables users to drill back into the 3rd, 2d, and 1st, centuries B.C. and view events previously ignored.

What the skies report must be analyzed with reference to the parameters dictated by Matthew's account in Matthew 2:1-12. I observed ten restrictions while Larson noted nine.

My list summarizes details revealed in Matthew 2:1-11:

- (1) The Magi were not initially 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 Jew's star (v. 2a).
- (3) The Magi *saw* the star originally while in Parthia, therefore it was a visual phenomenon (v. 2b).
- (4) They saw the star as it rose in the east (v. 2b).
- (5) The Magi informed Herod of the time they observed the star. Matthew 2:16 enables us to infer that the sighting was somewhat less than two years prior to their arrival in Jerusalem (v. 7 cf. v. 16)
- (6) The star appeared 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 then to the south (v. 9d).
- (10) The star is said to "stand over the place where the Child was (v. 9e).²

Rick Larson's list summarizes details related to the star in light of Matthew 2:1-11:

- (1) It signified birth.
- (2) It signified kingship.
- (3) It had a connection with the Jewish nation.
- (4) It rose in the east, like other stars.
- (5) It appeared at a precise time.
- (6) Herod didn't know when it appeared.

¹ Starry Night Pro: 6.3 Version was used in my research for this series. © 2007 by Imaginova Corp. All rights reserved.

² Joe Griffin, "The Mystery of the Star," chap. 16 in *The Concept of Freedom by the Founding Fathers: Intermezzo* (St. Charles: Joe Griffin Media Ministries, 2009), 201.

- (7) It endured over time.
- (8) I was ahead of the Magi as they went south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
- (9) It stopped over Bethlehem.³

It might also be noted that Larson refers to the Magi as being from Persia, however the Persian Empire was conquered by the Parthians:

Mithradates I became the founder of the Parthian Empire (c. 170–138). He had to fight hard with the Greeks of Bactria; at last he was able to conquer a great part of eastern Iran. Soon after the death of Antiochus IV (163) he conquered Media; and about 141 he invaded Babylonia. He and his son Phraates II defeated the attempts of Demetrius II (139) and Antiochus VII (129) to regain the eastern provinces, and extend the Arsacid dominion to the Euphrates.⁴

At the time of the Lord's birth the Parthian Empire was the dominant power east of the Euphrates River, the boundary established by a treaty with Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus following Mark Antony's defeat at the hands of the Parthians. The victory was more the result of attrition than battlefield prowess but the retreat by Antony brought a period of peace between the two powers that extended from 36 B.C. to A.D. 58 which included the period of the Lord's incarnation.⁵

Larson also refers to the Magi as "Persians" riding camels rather than Parthians riding horses, but recognizes that due to various Diasporas, the makeup of the Magi no doubt included a large number of Jews.

In Larson's article "The Starry Dance," he describes several celestial events that resulted in the Magi concluding that the King of the Jews had been born. It will be helpful if these events are both discussed and illustrated prior to viewing the DVD presentation of his research.

An important concept must be understood before we move forward and it is summarized by Paul as he quotes the Lord from Isaiah 6:9–10:

Acts 28:26 - 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive."

This was also a popular critique that the Lord directed toward those that did not understand His message or His Person throughout the Gospels, for example:

John 12:40 - "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them."

The source of both quotes is from:

Isaiah 6:9 - 'Keep listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.'

³ Rick Larson, "Setting the Stage," in *The Star of Bethlehem*, <http://bethlehemstar.net/stage/stage/htm>.

⁴ Eduard Meyer, "Parthia," in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13th ed., (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1926), 20:871.

⁵ A detailed description of the battles between the Romans and the Parthians in 36 B.C. is found in Plutarch's "Antony" in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans in Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 14:748–779.

Herod was not a Jew but an Idumean Arab. He had no interest in the spiritual life of Israel and the Jews who were the leaders of the spiritual life were more involved with ritual rather than the reality they portrayed. Both had eyes to see but could not see things spiritual or literal. What appeared to be a normal night sky to them was filled with "signs" that forecast and reported the birth of the Messiah.

On the other hand, the Magi were trained experts in astronomy. They had learned their profession from their predecessors and each had gained their own experience in reading the luminaries.

The Lord himself informed Adam what He meant in Genesis 1:14 when he referred to the "lights in the expanse of the heaven" as being for "signs" among other things.

David, in a passage we have noted, is inspired to inform us about the celestial objects' mission to silently communicate to us events of significance in the angelic conflict.

Psalm 19:1 - The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

v. 2 - Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

v. 3 - There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

v. 4 - Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.

We are going to observe these phenomena silently "pour forth speech" and "reveal knowledge" that the trained eye can understand but to those who have no interest the message will go unperceived although the phenomena may be clearly seen.

Among the heavenly bodies that will dominate this last segment of our study are the constellations Leo and Virgo, the planets Jupiter and Venus, and the star Regulus.

There is a significant phenomenon typical of the movement of planets among the fixed stars called "retrogradation" that needs to be defined and explained.

Retrograde motion is the orbital motion of a body in a direction opposite that which is normal to spatial bodies within a given system. "Retrograde" derives from the Latin words *retro*, backwards, and *gradus*, step.

In the Solar system mostly everything rotates in the same sense: all major planets orbit the Sun counterclockwise as seen from the pole star Polaris. Most planets spin in the same sense, including Earth. The same happens with the orbital motions of the Moon, Mars' moons, and the biggest moons of Jupiter and Saturn around their planets. All these motions are called "direct" or "prograde."

Rotation in the opposite sense is called *retrograde*. Venus and Uranus spin clockwise, so they have a retrograde rotation. Some small moons orbit clockwise around their planet, and are called *retrograde satellites*. All these are the exception rather than the rule.

When we observe the sky, we expect most objects to appear to move in a particular direction with the passing of time. The apparent motion of most bodies in the sky is from east to west.

Retrograde motion should not be confused with retrogradation. The latter term is used in reference to the motion of the outer planets (Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and so forth). Though these planets appear to move from east to west on a nightly basis in response to the spin of Earth, they are most of the time drifting slowly eastward with respect to the background of stars, which can be observed by noting the position of these planets for several nights in a row. This motion is normal for these planets, so it is called direct motion (not retrograde). However, since Earth completes its orbit in a shorter period of time than these outer planets, we occasionally overtake an outer planet, like a faster car on a multiple-lane highway. When this occurs, the planet we are passing will first appear to stop its eastward drift, and it will then appear to drift back toward the west. This is retrogradation, since the planet seems to be moving in a direction opposite to that which is typical for planets. Finally as Earth swings past the planet in its orbit, it appears to resume its normal west-to-east drift on successive nights.⁶

With at least a cursory understanding of retrogradation of planets viewed from Platform Earth there are a number of celestial objects that need to be introduced along with some specific events related to them.

⁶ “Retrograde Orbit-Definition,” WordIQ.com (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Retrograde_orbit).