



## World Christian Fellowship

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### **Matthew 2:1** **Who were the wise Men?**

**Matthew 2:1**, *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,*

**Who were the wise men?**

**How many were there?**

**Were they really kings?**

**Did they really ride camels?**

**Why did they come to Bethlehem?**

“Many absurd traditions and guesses respecting these visitors to our Lord’s cradle have found their way into popular belief and into Christian art. They were said to be kings and three in number. They were said to be representatives of three families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and, therefore, one of them is pictured as an Ethiopian. Their names are given as Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior.”

Their three skulls, amazingly enough, are said to have been found. Yes, they were found “in the twelfth century by Bishop Reinald of Cologne.” The bishop dug those up and knew right

off they were skulls. It's very clear. And their eyes were still in the sockets fixed toward Bethlehem. Today, believe it or not, friends, they are on exhibit in a priceless casket in a great cathedral in Europe.

Now frankly, folks, the only thing we know about these wise men is some history and what is said in Matthew.

*"There came wise men from the East."*

We do not know their names.

But as we put the pieces together, historically, and we do have some very fascinating history.

Some of it from the Old Testament, books such as Daniel where the Magi or wise men appear in several different texts, other Bible books as well as the writings of Herodotus and other historians.

We believe they were members of an Eastern priestly group, descendant of a tribe of people originally associated with the Medes.

Basically, in the history of the world there have been four major world empires.

First one was the **Babylonian Empire**. This empire was settled in the fertile crescent area east of Israel in the valley of the Tigris

and Euphrates River, north of the Arabian gulf, east of what we know is Israel today. That was where the Babylonian Empire was.

The second great world empire that Daniel talks about, and that was the Empire known as the **Medo-Persian Empire**. It was a conglomerate empire made up of the Persians and the Medes. The Medes were a very large and powerful people.

The third great world empire was **Greece**. When the Medo-Persian Empire was conquered by **Alexander the Great**, the world became Greek, as it were.

The fourth great empire was the **Roman Empire**.

While the Babylonian Empire was in existence there was still Medes and Persians. So, they are very ancient people. In fact, there are many people in history who trace the origin of the Medes all the way back to the time when Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, way back in the 12th chapter of Genesis.

So, it may well be that these are very ancient people. Certainly, they are people who appear in the Babylonian Empire because we see them in the book of Daniel. They are people from the Medo-Persian Empire and existed on through the time of the Greek Empire and are still in existence in the Roman Empire when Christ is born.

So, they are a very ancient and long-lived people were these wise men.

**V2**, 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.”*

The Greek is magos, magoi, magi.

It is really an untranslatable word. It is simply the name of a certain tribe of people. It should better be translated, perhaps, magi.

The magi were a priestly line, a priestly tribe of people from among the Medes, this very ancient and large people. They were very skilled in astronomy and astrology. This was a very great preoccupation with them.

They were occultists. They practised divination processes. They were involved in certain kinds of things like a sorcery and that's why the word magi was corrupted through history into the word magic, magician, which is a synonym for sorcerer.

But the magi originally were basically a pagan, priestly tribe of people from the Medes and the Persians and there are many historical sources to validate this.

They became interested in astronomy and astrology and the study of the stars. Those days they did not make much of a separation between the superstition and the science.

The science is astronomy,  
the superstition is astrology,

During the time of the Babylonian Empire, and Medo-Persian these magi were dwelling in the area of Babylon.

Now while they were there during the Babylonian Empire, they were very heavily influenced by the Jews.

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon did was take Judah into captivity. Jeremiah pronounced this fact and of course even the book of Lamentations laments this reality. They were carried off into the Babylon captivity.

Babylon had these magi, and they were very high-ranking officials. By that time, they had ascended to a high place in the Babylonian Empire because of their amazing intuition, wisdom, knowledge, astrology, occultic ability, whatever you want to call it, they had risen to a place of prominence.

Immediately, they encountered all these Jewish people that had been brought to captivity. They also met one very specific Jew by the name of Daniel, who was elevated in the Babylonian Empire.

They were made familiar in the dispersion of the Jews in Babylon with Jewish prophecy regarding the Messiah. They were made aware of what was really on the Jewish prophetic plan for this One who was to come.

### **Hereditary Priesthood:**

According to the ancient historian, **Herodotus**, the magi were a tribe of people within a larger people called the Medes. They were a hereditary priesthood tribe. In other words, they were like the Levites in Israel.

In Israel there were twelve tribes, but one of those tribes was set apart as the priestly tribe. They were the ones who ministered in the rituals and the religious ceremonies of the temple, and they were the Levites.

The pagan Medes had a similar thing. Of all the tribes within the Medes they had selected one of them to function as priests in their pagan rituals. That tribe which they had selected was the magi. This is the name of that priestly group of people. It was a hereditary priesthood.

### **Powerful:**

During the Babylonian World Empire, they were significant,  
During the Medo- Persia Empire they were significant,  
During the Greek Empire they were significant, and  
During the Roman Empire they were significant.

In all those empires they maintained a place of tremendous prominence in the orient, in the east.

Even when the Greek Empire was in vogue, there was still certain eastern culture and power. Even when the Roman Empire was in vogue there was certain eastern power. In both of those periods, the Magi were really the key people in the government of the East, cantered in the Fertile Crescent, the area around Babylon and Medo-Persia.

Now they always appear with tremendous political power.

Many historians see them as an eastern people who rose by virtue of their unique priestly function. By their unique rather occultic powers of divination, by their astrological, astronomical knowledge, they rose to places of prominence.

They rose to higher position in Babylonian government, Medo-Persian government, even in some cases in the East during the Greek period and for sure during the Roman period, to be the advisors to the royalty of the East.

That is where they got the name the Wise Men. They were the ones that were consulted about the various things that the kings and the rulers and the nobles and the princes wanted to know.

Their priesthood had certain functions and here are some of the things:

The principal element of their worships seems to have been **fire**.

It is apparent from history that they worshipped or that they sort of revered fire. We do not know for sure why, but perhaps they saw fire as incarnation of deity.

They were monotheistic, they only believed in one God and so they had that in common with Israel. But they looked at fire as the principle element of their worship. They had an altar which burned with a perpetual flame. They believed that that perpetual flame was kindled by God from heaven.

In their temples they also had another altar and they **offered blood sacrifice**. They had a blood sacrificial system.

They lit the fire to burn the sacrifice with the flame off the perpetual altar. When they had burned their sacrifice, the victim was then eaten by the worshiper and by the Magian priests.

What fascinating was that it was almost a direct parallel to Judaism.

**How Satan was counterfeiting true religion from the very beginning?**

Those times there was real sacrificial system with genuine worship toward the one right true God, and there was phony monotheism, phony blood sacrifice, false sacrifice, and offering burned and then eaten by the worshiper and the priest.

These people carried about small bundles of divining rods in their garments, and they used these divining rods for their little ceremonies.

Not unlike the **Urim** and the **Thummim** of the priests, the high priest, by which the knowledge of God was sought. They believed in the distinction of certain kinds of unclean animals.

They believed that certain insects and certain reptiles were unclean. Again, this is an interesting parallel to what God truly revealed to Israel. They were very ritualistic about ever touching and disposing of a dead body, another thing common to God's standard for Israel.

So, in the Babylonian Empire this very interesting religious group of people appears. They rose to tremendous prominence.

**Jeremiah 39:3**, *Then all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezzer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sarezzer, Rabmag, with the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon.*

**Jeremiah 39:13**, *So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent Nebushasban, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the king of Babylon's chief officers;*

These oriental kings starting with Nebuchadnezzar had elevated the Magi, and even before that. But as far as the Scripture is concerned, we see them first with Nebuchadnezzar. They had elevated this priestly group from the Medes to the place of being the official advisors to the king.

They are tremendously powerful people. Even when Babylon fell and the Medo-Persian Empire came in and great rulers like Cyrus and others, still the high-ranking officials of the Medo-Persian government being taken from this group called Magi. They were unmatched in political power.

**Daniel 2:10**, *The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean.*

In the court of Nebuchadnezzar Daniel is there, the Jews are in captivity in Babylon.

Astrologer and Chaldean may just be other ways of saying the same thing.

So here we find the word Magi, it is not strictly the word magician, that is an English corruption it is the word Magi.

It is talking about this priestly tribe. They had a very prominent place at that time. They were known as those who could interpret dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar had this bizarre dream and none of them could handle it. There was one man who could interpret it. It was Daniel.

**Daniel 4:7-9**, *Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation. <sup>8</sup>But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, saying: <sup>9</sup>“Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.*

Rather than call them magicians, they should be Magi. That is essentially what he is referring to. Now when Daniel came along and all these Magi who were in the high-ranking place of advisors to the king could not give any answers, Daniel could, something amazing happened.

**Daniel 5:11**, *There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your <sup>le</sup>father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.*

Daniel was so adept at telling the dreams of the king that the king made Daniel the master of the Magi, so that Daniel was literally in Babylon the chief over this whole priestly group.

Now, that puts Daniel in the tremendously unique position of being able to dispense to these Magi all his information about the Old Testament, which without a shadow of a doubt is precisely what Daniel did.

We know that Daniel was a man of God. We know that Daniel was a man totally devoted to worship and expression of his faith because he wound up in a lion's den.

Daniel and the other godly remnant in the dispersion, shared their knowledge of the Old Testament and their copies of the Scripture with these people in Babylon.

Additionally, when the final decree of Cyrus came that they could go back to the land most of the Jews never went back. Many of the Jews stayed in Babylon, intermingled, intermarried, and throughout the remaining history of Babylon and Medo-

Persia there were people in the noble families, people in the high-ranking offices, some say even monarchs in that part of the world who had part Jewish blood.

Certainly, we would have to conclude that Daniel had a profound impact in the dispensing of that information.

If Daniel was so good at winning these Magi over and convincing them about this fact of the coming Messiah, why was it that they plotted against him and threw him in the lion's den, if he was so influential and believable?

The sixth chapter of Daniel we find a plot against Daniel based on jealousy. But what is amazing **about this plot is that it is not a plot devised by the Magi** who dominated the hierarchy of the royal court.

It is a plot developed by men known as **the satraps**. That was the term used to describe the regional governors who had nothing to do with the palace. The plot that was hatched in jealousy against Daniel was not a plot hatched at the hands of the Magi. Daniel was extremely believable and convincing in his impact.

When Daniel was thrown in the lion's den, the king was worried and could not sleep the whole night fasting.

**Daniel 6:20**, *And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"*

The king was so convinced of the power of God through the testimony of Daniel. So, the Magi kept their place of prominence, influenced, by such a great man as Daniel.

They became and maintained a position in the Medo-Persian Empire of great power in the court of the king.

In the **551-486 B.C.**, there was a great king of Persia by the name of **Darius the Great**. This is in the Medo-Persian Empire. This is right around the time of Daniel.

Darius said, "I am going to establish a national religion." He picked Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism had with it a lot of astrology. The astrology and the preoccupation of the Magi with that, came in the merging of Zoroastrianism.

There were these Magi who have their own culture religion. On top of that has been superimposed Judaism, and on top of that has been superimposed Zoroastrianism.

The Magi was so anxious to maintain their political power, and they were so anxious to maintain their religious power that when the decree came from Darius that Zoroastrianism was the

religion that was going to exist. They accepted it and made some adaptations.

Some of them committed to ancient Magian formulas and some of them maybe believing in their heart, that the God of Daniel was the real God.

This is the key. As history moved on from here, the Magi began to depart from a singular commitment to their historic religion, and they began to find their way into different things.

Some maybe leaning toward Zoroastrianism,  
Some toward the ancient magicians,  
Some believed along Judaism.

Some of these Magi that show up at the birth of Christ, were true seekers of the true God.

### **History.**

The Magi were so powerful that historians tell us that no Persian was ever able to become king.

Never able to become king except under two conditions:  
One, he mastered the scientific and religious discipline of the Magi.

Two, he had to be approved of and crowned by the Magi.

## **Do you know what they called the wisdom of the Magi?**

The law of the Medes and the Persians.

That law was the law, or the code defined by the Magi.

**Esther 1:19**, *If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.*

**Daniel 6:15**, *Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."*

The law of the Medes and the Persians was the code, the scientific religious discipline of the Magi.

Their wisdom was that which was required for anyone to be a monarch in Persia. Additionally, historians tell us that they controlled the judicial office as well as the kingly office.

**Esther 1:13**, *Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice,*

The royal bench of judges was all chosen from the Magi.

When we look at the Persian Empire and the Median Empire and the Babylonian Empire, we are talking about control of the Orient. This is a massive empire.

In the Babylonian time and the Med- Persian time, they literally controlled the known world. These were powerful men.

They were not only responsible for making every monarch that was made in that era, but they were responsible for setting up the judges as well.

They had a check system for the dictatorship that could grow out of a kingship, and so they were the judges that counter-balanced the dictator king. History tells us they knew astronomy, they were very good in mathematics, they knew natural history, they were good at agriculture and architecture.

In Acts 7 that talks about the fact that Moses was raised up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Same thing was true of anybody who was raised in a nobility in the East. They were raised in the law of the Medes and the Persians, all nobility raised by them. They were the kingmakers.

They were the kingmakers, and no one ruled at all apart from them. One of their special skills was interpreting dreams.

When they failed to interpret the dream and Daniel moved in on top of it and became the chief.

This setup was made by God 600 hundred years before Jesus was born to set the scene for **Matthew chapter 2**.

God was setting up the situation for a great Hebrew prophet to rule a group called the Magi so that one day when a baby was born in Bethlehem, some of those Magi would find their way to the house where the baby was.

The mixed hybrid religion of the Magi very much like Judaism,

- Monotheistic,
- Fire,
- Hereditary priesthood,
- Blood sacrifice,
- Believed in supernatural revelation,
- Prophecy.

These common things sort of made Judaism an easy thing for them to accept.

There were some God-fearing gentile Magi historically existing in that eastern part of the world.

## **Matthew 2.**

After 600 years Jesus was born.

Somehow and by some marvellous way God has managed to maintain some true seeking Magi. Most may be corrupted.

There were some like Cornelius God-fearing gentiles.

There were some like Lydia, a God-fearing gentile.

There were some back there in that part of the world, some from the Magi, high-ranking kingmakers in the great Empire of the east.

There were some at that time who were still waiting for Daniel's great hope to be fulfilled, you see.

Rome feared the Eastern Empire.

In Europe, the Roman Empire, was massive. Technically it swept to the east. But by virtue of distance, across the Mediterranean, across the blazing desert to get to the east, there was a certain isolation in the east which caused Rome a lot of anxiety.

They were always fearful that what then became known as the **Parthian Empire**, the Eastern Empire made up of the Medes and the Persians and the old Babylonian territory, that Parthian Empire was always kind of an anxiety for Rome.

Rome had stretched its arms out as it were to rule the world, but they never really felt very secure about the Parthian Empire. They had become violent enemies.

They fought in 55 B.C. and in 40 B.C.

### **Where they always fought?**

The great empire in the west, the great empire in the east came together and they always fought along the coast of the Mediterranean, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. Israel was a little no man's land between the powers of the east and the powers of the west.

Now Rome was afraid of them.

**Matthew 2:3**, *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

When he heard that Magi, oriental, Parthian kingmakers had arrived in Jerusalem he was rattled.

By the time we get to the time of Christ the Magi are still in tremendous power in the east. Some of them used their power, their position, their skills, with a great amount of human wisdom.

Some of them just really turned into awful people. Like any scientist, any priest, any preacher any other skilled person of modern days, we can either apply our craft deceitfully or we can apply it honestly.

Some of the Magi were honest and they exalted the craft of wisdom and political advice. Some of them were corrupt and they corrupted it.

Couple of corrupt ones.

**Simon:**

**Acts 8:4-5**, *Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.*

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them, and the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

**Acts 8:9-10**, *But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, <sup>10</sup> to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."*

Now here is Simon the Magi who has prostituted his position into deceit, and he has sold himself to Satan. He used sorcery.

The root of that word is Magi, mageu, in the Greek. He used his Magi art in a prostituted manner.

Later he tried to buy the Holy Spirit and Peter really lays him out.

**Acts 8:20-22**, *But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. <sup>22</sup> Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.*

### **Elymas**

**Acts 13:6-11**, *Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup> who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.*

Both Simon and Elymas were brought into the bondage of Satan himself who is the god of all astrologers and the god of all sorcerers.

These were the kind of people, the kind of Magi the Romans despised. But in the east, they were tremendously powerful men.

Now at the time of Christ in the Eastern Empire, there was a ruling body called the **Megistanes**.

The **Megistanes**, be like the upper house in our Parliament. This ruling house ruled in the Parthian-Persian Empire at this time. It consists fully Magi whose duty it was to have absolute choice for the selection of a king. They were kingmakers.

They had some real problems with the king that they had. They wanted to fight Rome and knock off Rome. But they had a loser for a king, **Phraates IV**. Phraates the Fourth had been deposed. The Magi were looking for a new king, a new king of the east, a new king of the Eastern Empire who could come against Rome.

When they arrived in Jerusalem Herod knew what was going on. They were kingmakers and when they wandered around town saying, "Where is this new king of the Jews?"

Herod got panicky. When suddenly these Persian kingmakers appeared in Jerusalem, no doubt traveling in full force with all their oriental pomp.

They used to wear conical hats with points on the top and big deals clear down to the bottom of their chin, and they rode

Persian horses not camels. When they came in they didn't come alone. The estimates of history are they came with Persian cavalry. When they came charging into the city of Jerusalem and Herod peeked out his little palace window, he flipped.

These are powerful men, and to make it worse his army was out of the country on a mission. The Bible says Herod was troubled. The word in the Greek is he was agitated like our washing machine.

**Herod** had a title as **King of the Jews**. He got it from **Caesar Augustus**. Caesar Augustus crowned him king of the Jews.

Herod realized the great dream of his life was to get that little buffer state under his power, and here he was in the middle of two huge contending empires. Suddenly, this massive coterie of Persians arrives in the city and he is panicked.

When they say, "We are coming to find the new king." Now at the time Herod was close to death. Caesar Augustus was old and hanging by a thread.

Since the retirement of **Tiberius**, the Roman army did not even have a commander-in-chief. They knew that this would be the time to bring about an eastern war against the west. So, Herod was shaking.

### **Did the magi look at it politically?**

Here comes the king.

### **Did the Magi look at it spiritually?**

Probably true because when they got to that little room in Bethlehem, the Bible says they worshipped Him.

They saw more than just a king.

I believe they saw the Messiah they had heard about from the days of Daniel.

Maybe this is the Saviour, the Saviour who is called the Anointed One," which is a term describing a king.

The Magi knew that the people of Israel were on their side, not Rome's. Because for both common enemy was Rome.

They thought the people of Israel would be just as excited as they were. But you see the people of Israel were blinded by their unbelief.

### **Conclusion:**

The first people in the world to recognize the arrival of the King were Gentiles.

### **Does that tell you something about history?**

**John 1:11**, *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*

Matthew follows that all the way through.

**Isn't it exciting to you how God controls history?  
Does that excite you?**

History is His story.

Long ago He picked out a man named Daniel, put him in a place

**Why does Matthew present this?**

Matthew, all the way through his gospel is trying to tell the world that Jesus Christ is King.

Matthew wants to make sure nobody misses it he has the most famous kingmakers in the world come and bow down at His feet.

**Do you see?**

It is all a part of Matthew's strategy.

He is the king.

If Israel is not going to acknowledge it, then God is going to drag a bunch of people from Persia to acknowledge it.

God has master planned history.

The sad part of it is that the people who should have known missed it. The people from way off, who should have never guessed, showed up and worshipped.

That is history. Jesus came.

Paul said, "To the Jew first, also to the Gentiles."

Jesus came and said, "I'm come not but for the lost sheep for the house of Israel."

Israel turned its back on Christ, and He called a people from a no people.

In our world today they celebrate Christmas, pass around the Christmas cards, look at the wise men.

They do not understand the point.

They do not know the meaning.

They do not see who He is.

There are some of us who bow to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.