

The Star of Bethlehem

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This is a topic that has piqued my curiosity for years now. As a Christian & a traditional/classical astrologer, I have read just about every theory out there and devoted some time to examining the various arguments, speculations, and facts we can point to. We are dealing with ancient history; sometimes the evidence is ambiguous or non-existent so it is clear my opinion is also largely conjecture.

The story of the Star of Bethlehem is found in the second chapter of the book of Matthew in the New Testament.

*“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came **wise men** from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship¹ him.”*

Many questions present themselves and perhaps these following two are at the top of the list; what did the wise men see that led them to believe a king would be born in Israel? Why were they even interested? To answer those questions one has to know 1) what astrology was being practiced at the time and 2) the historical context.

Who were these wise men?

First of all it has been romanticized in history that these wise men were ‘Magi’ or Zoroastrian priests. The Greek word used in the New Testament by Matthew is *magos* (μάγος). It can mean ‘magian’. But it was also used to mean an oriental scientist or wise man, just as the translators of the New Testament translated it. The word *magos* is originally derived from the Hebrew רַב־מָג, *rab-mâg*, which also meant a Babylonian official. So while the word by inference did mean chief magi, very simply what Matthew could just as likely been saying was that there came these wise men (astronomers/astrologers) who were an official envoy from the Parthian empire that was, by all intents and purposes, the former Babylon.

There is very little on which to base an assumption that these wise men (if the story is true) were Zoroastrian priests. The fact is that the detailed summary of the canon of 21 sections of the Sassanian *Avesta* contained in the 8th book of the *Dēnkard*² does not appear to make any explicit reference to astrology. In fact it is only in a few religious texts from the 9th century CE, like the *Bundahišn*³ that have any real astrological content.

Perhaps if we take a little walk through history we can gain a little more understanding.

¹ *proskuneō* gr - literally or figuratively to prostrate oneself in homage. As you will see later in this study, paying homage is much closer to the truth than using the religiously loaded word, worship.

² A summary that is based on the Pahlavi commented translation of the Nasks. The 21 Nasks of Avesta: are supposedly the 21 Volumes which Prophet Zarathustra brought with him and presented to king Vishtaspa.

³ This is a miscellaneous religious work whose last important redaction probably dates from around the end of the 9th century. In the chapter containing the astrological doctrines it attributes them to the sacred corpus of the Zoroastrian religion. Since the main corpus of remaining sacred texts make no mention then it is hard to say if this attribution is fact or myth.

After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, the Iranian Plateau fell into the hands of Seleucus I Nicator, one of the *Diadochoi* (Alexander's generals). He established a Hellenistic state known as the Seleucid Empire, which at its height extended from modern-day Turkey to modern-day Pakistan. The Seleucids, although certainly influenced by the Persian (Iranian) people over whom they ruled, still kept true to their Greco-Macedonian origins and hence were not seen as native rulers by their subjects.

By 155 BCE, the Parthians had risen and conquered all of the Iranian territories of the Seleucid Empire. The Parthians were a group of North-eastern Iranians.⁴ They were probably the greatest antagonists of the Roman Empire, and their culture is often neglected in history books. The Parthians themselves fell to Ardeshir I in 224 CE, who was another Persian from the province of Fars⁵ from where the Achaemenids⁶ came. He installed his own dynasty under the family name of his forefather *Sasan*.⁷

At the time of Christ, to the east of the Roman Empire, was the Parthian Empire. After the conquest of Media, Assyria, Babylonia and Elam, the Parthians had to organize their empire. The elite of these countries was Greek, and the new rulers adapted to the local customs. The Parthian monarch was the ruler of his own empire plus some eighteen vassal kings, such as the rulers of the city state Hatra,⁸ the port Characene,⁹ and the ancient kingdom Armenia.

I am often amazed at the lack of knowledge we find in the west concerning the history of that epochs 2 decidedly biggest “super powers”, Rome & Parthia. In the middle, at the point of contact of these two superpowers, lay Israel. It was conquered first by one power, the Roman Empire and then supported by the other, the Parthian Empire. Understanding the geo-political situation is necessary to understand the Magi’s role in the nativity story of Jesus.

In 55 BCE, the Parthian king Orodes slaughtered the Roman Consul Crassus’ 40,000 strong legions.¹⁰ In 40 BCE Parthia invaded Judea and deposed the Roman-selected leader and installed another, Antigonus, returning to power once again the earlier Hasmonean Dynasty.¹¹ Antigonus had the loyal support of both the aristocratic class in Jerusalem and the leaders of the Pharisees. In 37 BCE Mark Antony invaded Parthia with a massive 16 legions of 100,000 men. They were decimated and he barely escaped with his life. At the same time in Judea, the Roman backed Herod overthrew Antigonus in a three-year-long war between 37 and 34 BCE. Antigonus was after executed by Mark Antony and his Parthian supported Hasmonean dynasty ended. Herod the Great replaced him being put in power by triumvir Mark Antony.

⁴ This is the same region Balḥ in the Persian province of Khurāsān where Abu Ma’shār came from.

⁵ Originally known as *Pars*, which is where the word Persian comes from.

⁶ *I.e.* the ancient Iranian empire founded by Cyrus the Great.

⁷ And hence the Sassanian Empire

⁸ An ancient city in Upper Mesopotamia (today northern Iraq),

⁹ An important port for trade between Mesopotamia and India located along the Tigris River in modern Iraq at the head of the Persian Gulf.

¹⁰ Crassus was a powerful oligarch of Rome.

¹¹ As part of the ancient world conquered by Alexander the Great (332 BCE), the predominantly Jewish land remained a Jewish theocracy under Syrian-based Seleucid rulers. When the Jews were prohibited from practicing Judaism and their Temple was desecrated as part of an effort to impose Greek-oriented culture and customs on the entire population, the Jews rose in revolt (166 BCE). First led by Mattathias of the priestly Hasmonean family and then by his son Judah the Maccabee, the Jews subsequently entered Jerusalem and purified the Temple (164 BCE). Following further Hasmonean victories (147 BCE) the Seleucids restored autonomy to Judea (as the Land of Israel was now called) and, with the collapse of the Seleucid kingdom (129 BCE), Jewish independence was again achieved. The Kingdom, led by the Hasmonean kings, survived for 103 years before yielding to the Herodian Dynasty in 37 BCE.

So Rome once again controlled Judea. In 34 BCE Julius Caesar planned to attack Parthia but was assassinated in Rome before he could. A few years later a peace treaty was forged and because of this peace, trade was boosted from the Far East to Gaul in the West. It was this ‘era of prosperity’ that allowed the Temple at Jerusalem to be rebuilt. It was during this Augustan-Parthian peace, that Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem.

So exactly who were the wise men? Why would they want to come and give honour to the infant Jesus? Why did they come at all? How many were there? Why didn’t Herod kill them? I think I can answer these questions in the following.

The Head of the Parthian Empire was called *Arsaces*, ‘King of kings’. The dynasty had a succession of 30 *Arsakoi* kings. They ruled from 255 BCE for nearly half a millennium,¹² more than any single dynasty before or since. The kings were selected, elected and sometimes rejected by a Council of Wisemen & priestly scientists. These were most likely the wise men!¹³

Matthew tells that these “wise men”, came from the east on their quest to find this king which was to be born in Israel. That means they travelled from the Parthian Empire, a goodly distance overland for that time in history. They didn’t just board a plane or train or drive. There were several major cities that were “capitals” for the rulers of Parthia. For example from the main Parthian capital at *Ctesiphon*¹⁴ to Jerusalem was 685 miles (1103km).

To put that distance into perspective, in the summer of 1970, I and 3 friends rode our horses from San Bernadino in Southern California to Yosemite Park in Northern California. We took what was then called the “Equestrian trail” which followed, more or less, the Sierra Nevada mountain range. It was a little over 550 miles and took us about 40 days. I can well imagine these wise men’s journey. In those days travel by land was fraught with all kinds of dangers. Most travelled together in caravans and they would travel between known locations of water. It took them many hours to set and break camp each day if they were many. We were only 4 and it took us a couple of hours each afternoon to make camp set up our tents, make food, and water and feed the horses. We had to stop each day well before dark otherwise we were stumbling around in the dark trying to find wood and get our camp set up. That happened once in the beginning and we quickly learned to stop at the right time and place. But it meant we often would not travel more than 15 miles in a day; especially when we had to climb any mountain passes. These wise men would have faced other obstacles like scorching midday heat and they would often rest at this time and travel early in the morning and afternoons. So they too did not travel far each day.

The wise men were most likely the resplendently rich Parthian kingmakers who would have come to Jerusalem in a massive caravan or not at all! The Parthians were highly mobile and as I already mentioned, had several capitals. They travelled in massive oriental style caravans. For example, the general selected by King Orodes to fight the Roman invader Crassus arrived with two hundred litters for his concubines. A thousand camels carried his personal baggage. A body of ten thousand horsemen and slaves served his personal needs. So it was not just some simple little caravan of three Wisemen who travelled to Jerusalem. I doubt the wise

¹² 224 CE

¹³ See the historical books ‘*Parthia*’ by George Rawlinson & *Parthia, Forgotten Super-power* by Steven M. Collins

¹⁴ Located approximately where modern day Al-Mada’in is found, 32 km (20 mi) southeast of the modern city of Baghdad, Iraq, along the river Tigris (also the general region of ancient Babylon.)

men's caravan was that resplendent but most certainly would have perhaps numbered one or two hundred.

Just imagine if you will, you are a king and an envoy from the rival super-power comes to you looking for someone who is by all apparent purposes, going to usurp you as king! The super-power (Parthia) that had facilitated and supported the previous ruler YOU had overthrown and had killed. Their visit was totally political and a show of support for this “new king” who was born. By and large the Jews hated Herod who only recently had slaughtered several thousand Pharisees in the temple demanding their allegiance to Cesar.¹⁵ Then an envoy from a rival power shows up asking where the new king was to be born. That was an intense political statement. There is a very good reason why Herod, when he heard that these wise men had shown up on his doorstep, “... *was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.*”¹⁶ The only religious aspect of their visit was the fact that they believed all kingships were divinely appointed.

The story in Matthew tells us further that,

“And (the wise men) being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way...Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.”¹⁷

So not only did they come to show support for a new king, but when they had found Jesus they left without a word to Herod. He was so incensed by this political affront, and to him an obvious attempt at the usurping of his power and authority, he had every new born child, including his own son, up to the age of 2 years old murdered.¹⁸

Historical context certainly gives a little different perspective of people and events.

The Astrology of the Persians in the late 1st century BCE

We know some details of the type of “omen lore” which prevailed in Mesopotamia up to about 400 BCE. These are recorded in the tablets of the *Enūma Anu Enlil*. These were astronomical diaries documenting the rising and settings of the planets (or their phases to the Sun) as well as lunar observations and eclipses. With these observations follow omens and predictions of the astronomical significance. At that time there was no “personal horoscopy” as we know it. The omens concerned the welfare and state of being of kingdoms and kings. From the last century of the Neo-Assyrian Empire survive remnants of letters and messages sent to the Assyrian kings by the astrologers and experts in divination of the omens. It was in the Persian Dynasty¹⁹ under Cyrus the Great that simple ‘omen lore’ began to change and we have the first rudiments of a natal astrology.

¹⁵ In 8 BCE Augustus quarrelled with Herod, and told him that he would thereafter treat him not as a friend but as a subject. No doubt this argument led to the tax enrolment of all citizens in Judea. The tax was later collected in 6 AD which led to riots and a violent insurgency against Augustus Cesar. The murder of the Pharisees was a part of Herod trying to appease Augustus in demanding loyalty of the religious hierarchy and nobility.

¹⁶ Matthew Chapter 2 verse 3, The King James Bible

¹⁷ Matthew Chapter 2 verses 12 & 16 – King James Bible

¹⁸ On hearing that the son of Herod, king of the Jews, had been slain when Herod ordered that all boys in Judea under the age of two to be killed, Augustus said, “*It's better to be Herod's pig, than his son*” (dicta 56 Malc) Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, Saturnalia, Book 2, section 4:11. p. 349

¹⁹ The Achaemenid Persian Empire (550–330 BCE)

The question we need to ask and try to answer, is just what the wise men were practicing at the end of the 1st century BCE? This period at the very end of the century is where the “beginnings” of Hellenistic astrology are assumed so it contains names such as Hermes, Asclepius, Nechepso and Petosiris, Timaeus, and Teucer of Babylon.

Abu Sahl al-Faḍl ibn Nawbakht²⁰ in his astrology book, *Kitāb al-nahmaṭān*, invokes some of these same names as contributors to the science of the Persians. Abu Ma’shār invokes the names of Hermes and Asclepius in his history of the science. But it is the cycles of the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn and the *fardār* which appear to be the central contribution of the Persian astrologers.²¹ Mundane astrology is in fact noticeably missing from the Hellenistic epoch.²²

Persian astrologers such as Māshā’allāh & Abu Ma’shār transmitted an ancient astrological tradition. In his book “*On the Thousands*”, Abu Ma’shār & other Persian sources are reported to have transmitted the genealogical history of Persian astrology.²³

In his Introduction to Ibn Ezra’s *The Book of the World*²⁴ Shlomo Sela notes,

“...the Persian provenance of this theory is in *Te’amim I*,²⁵ where he speaks of a series of cycles, including the three types of Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions, as the product of the “opinion of the scientists of Persia and India.”²⁶

There is a great lacuna in the astrology of the Persians under the Parthian dynasty. David Pingree emphasises this when he writes,

“In fact, virtually nothing is known of the astronomy and astrology of pre-Sasanian Iran... trustworthy knowledge of Iranian astronomy and astrology is non-existent before the reign of Shāpūr I (240-270 CE)”²⁷

Pingree also emphasises that simple diviners of the omen astrology of the earlier Babylonian culture were not popular amongst the Parthian kings;

“...but Macedonian or Parthian invaders were not as enthusiastic to employ the diviners as had been the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings, or even their Achaemenid successors.”²⁸

Another historian specialising in the astrology and religion of this period writes,

²⁰ The Persian astrologer to the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd and the son of al-Manṣūr’s astrologer was one of the foremost translators from Pahlavī into Arabic in the Treasure-house of Wisdom founded in Baghdad.

²¹ Neither one are found in Hellenistic natal astrology

²² With the exception of perhaps Ptolemy who looks at the weather via eclipses.

²³ “*The Thousands of Abu Ma’shār*”, by David Pingree – Studies of the Warburg Institute Volume 30, The University of London 1968 (see Chapter I, The Legendary Source of the Thousands)

²⁴ *Sefer ha-’Olam*

²⁵ Ibn Ezra’s “Book of Reasons” (*Sefer ha-Te’amim*)

²⁶ The Book of the World, Abraham Ibn Ezra’s *Sefer ha-’Olam*, English translation and commentary by Shlomo Sela – Brill 2010

²⁷ Page 240 “*Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran*” Isis, Volume 54 No. 2 (June 1963) pp 229-246

²⁸ *From Astral Omens to Astrology from Babylon to Bīkāner* – David Pingree 1997 (p 19) On what evidence Pingree bases this observation is not made clear in his work and he seems to pull that out of thin air given the fact that he has previously emphatically stated that there is no record of this time period.

*“...it is important to note that it appears **certain** that, by the Achmaemenid period, Zoroastrian priests had some knowledge of Mesopotamian astral mantic and proto-astrology. Nevertheless, if and how these disciplines had an impact on the Zoroastrian theology in the Achaemenid period and later, in the Seleucid and early Parthia periods, can only be a matter for speculation.”²⁹*

We do not know anything about the status of the astronomical and astrological professional competence developed in the Iranian world, especially under the Parthians. We can suppose that it was already strongly influenced by the Greco-Mesopotamian tradition, although we cannot exclude other external influences such as Egypt and India, as attested in the astrological back ground shown by some Gnostic movements (that of the Manichaeans,³⁰ for instance) active in the Iran-Mesopotamian areas.

The facts are that we have virtually nothing preserved **except** in the tradition of the Persians in the Sassanian dynasty³¹ and made popular in the 7th to 9th centuries by astrologers such as al-Andarzaghār (c 632 CE), Theophilus of Edessa (c 695 – 785 CE), Pseudo-Stephanus of Alexandria as preserved by Achmat the Persian, Māshā'allāh (d. ca. 815 CE) in his Book of Religions and Dynasties as preserved in the *Kitāb al-Mughnī* of Ibn Hibintā (composed after 928 CE), 'Umar b. al-Farrukhān al-Tabarī (fl. ca. 800) in his *Kitāb al-Qirānat wa-taḥwīl as-sinīn*, Kanakah al-Hindī (early Abbasid period) in his large and small *Kitāb al qirānāt* (Book of conjunctions), Abu Ma'shār in his *Kitāb al-milal wa-d-duwal* (The Book of Religions and Dynasties), and others.³²

We also have some indication in surviving texts which indicate that astrology was used by their scientist/priests, the wise men, primarily as a method of measuring **historical** and calendrical time. Again the historian tells us,

“The interest of the Zoroastrian priests in astrology, which by the Sassanian period made them include this system of knowledge even in their religious corpus, probably originates from the fact that astrology could be used as an instrument to analyse the course of history...”³³

The interesting part of that statement by this historian infers that at some point between the Achmaemenid period and the Sassanian period of Persian history, there was developed a form

²⁹ *Astrology and Religion in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi Texts* by Enricho G. Raffaelli (Pg. 172 in the Journal *Asiatique* 305.2 2017: 171 – 190)

³⁰ Manichaeism, dualistic religious movement founded in Persia in the 3rd century CE by Mani, who was known as the “Apostle of Light” and supreme “Illuminator.”

³¹ Al-Hāshimī (Persian historian in the 9th century CE) informs us in his book, *Kitāb fī 'ilal al-zījāt*, that the “cycles of the Persians” which was the basis of Abu Ma'shār's astrological history in his *Kitāb al-ulūf* were discovered preserved in a cave (*sarab*) in Iṣbahān. There are several variations of the history of their science but there is a core of truth behind all of them that more or less tells us that at some point the Persian teachings of the wise were hid from war & invaders so as not to be destroyed. When the first Sassanian King came to power, the texts were retrieved and translated to Pahlavi. It was at the same time texts from Hermes, Dorotheus & Ptolemy were also translated. This is in the early 3rd century CE. According to the Persian historian, “...also any teaching deriving from it which, although now scattered owing to the chaos and disruption which Alexander had brought in his wake and the pillage and looting of the Macedonians in the kingdom of Iran, either survived in writing or was preserved in an authoritative oral tradition.” I think it is fairly safe to say that the astrological doctrines did not just magically appear in the Sassanian period. They took time to develop and that development could only have happened at some time prior.

³² Ibn Ezra repeatedly refers to Māshā'allāh and once to al-Andarzaghār

³³ *Astrology and Religion in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi Texts* by Enricho G. Raffaelli (Pg. 173 in the Journal *Asiatique* 305.2 2017: 171 – 190)

of ‘astrology of the world’ and used as a means to date events in Aryan³⁴ history. With what we know, it is ludicrous to deny that the doctrines surrounding historical astrology and cycles could very well have originated in the practice of these pre-Sassanian priestly astronomers and astrologers known as the wise men. I also realise that we can never know for sure unless some historical documents come to light elucidating this period of history.

What could the wise men have seen?

One possibility is that it could have been a comet. I doubt that it was Halley’s Comet which had appeared in 12 BCE. Many historians now place Herod’s death at 4 BCE although there are a hardcore few who still insist he died in 1 BCE. I am not going to go into the arguments for or against 4 BCE simply because both dates have certain ambiguities arguing against them. In my own opinion there are fewer ambiguities and more facts arguing for the 4 BCE date. So accepting he did die in 4 BCE the question is, are there any recorded incidents of comets in the 2 to 3 years prior 4 BCE? The answer is yes. John Williams, in a catalogue published in London in 1871, lists as entries 52 and 53 two comets sighted by Chinese and Korean astronomers in 5 BC and early 4 BC respectively. However in an article in the Royal Astronomical Society of Great Britain, the date for the second sighting is a calendric impossibility and an obvious slip of the pen. The accepted consensus is that the second was most likely the same as the first sighting. The comet would have been visible “rising in the east” for observers in what are modern Iraq, Iran and China. However, it would not have been visible after the time expired for these Magi to have travelled to Judea.

Some claim that the Bethlehem Star can't be a real star or a comet and therefore there must be a supernatural explanation like an angel or a super nova or ball lightning or some other phenomenon because Matthew says:

“*The star went before them until it stopped over the place where the child was.*”³⁵

There is an astronomical reason why it appeared the star went before them and stopped and I will get into this later. I disagree that the “star” was something extraordinary. If that had been the case then more than just the wise men would have seen it. There was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary that was not seen every night. For the untrained in astronomy or astrology there was nothing to see. Herod’s wise men were not astronomers nor were they astrologers but had only prophecy to guide them. They saw nothing out of the ordinary. Only through Hebrew prophecy could they point to Bethlehem when asked about the birth of a king. It is in the prophet Micah that Bethlehem is given as where the Christ would be born!

“*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*”³⁶

The second possibility is one that has been mentioned several times in the last years and that is it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which we know occurred in 7 BCE. Not only do we know it today but we also know that it was expected by Chaldean astrologers. This

³⁴ A name originally given to a people who were said to speak an archaic Indo-European language and who were thought to have settled in prehistoric times in ancient Iran and the northern Indian subcontinent

³⁵ Matthew Chapter 2, verse 9 – King James Bible

³⁶ In the Old Testament prophets, Micah chapter 5 verse 2. – The King James Bible

conjunction had been foretold years in advance in the *Almanac of Sippur*³⁷ so it's very possible the wise men were even anticipating it.

There was a system of assigning planets to countries or peoples which made Saturn the special protector of the Jewish people. The Roman historian Tacitus for example, without explanation, refers to Saturn as the god of the Jews. In al-Birūnī's list of the significations of the planets we find for Saturn,

“Indications as to Religions & Pictures of the Planets – Saturn: Jews and those who dress in black.”

In Abu Ma'shār's opus on Historical Astrology we find this signification given to Saturn,

“Related to the superior planet furthest from the world of generation and corruption, i.e. to Saturn, is the indication for matters of Beginnings like religions, dynasties, and whatever lasts for a long time, since it is like the beginning for the other celestial bodies in terms of height.”

It would fit the astrology of the times to be very concerned with the risings of Saturn and Jupiter from the Sun (heliacal rising) at the revolution of the world year.³⁸ This was the case at the beginning of the world year in 7 BCE.

Especially worthy to note is that Saturn (closest to the horizon) is at its heliacal rising and the revealing of a new prophet/king.

In 7 BCE the planets Jupiter and Saturn were conjunct (occupying the same degree) three times that year. The first conjunction occurred in late May of that year. At this time of the year Jupiter and Saturn would not have been visible at night in Persia and Israel because by the time it was dark enough to see the stars after sunset these stars would have been on the other side of the earth. It would only have been visible in the early morning hours from about 4 to 8 am. (See figure 1 below) Sunrise would have occurred about 6 am. We also know thanks to those historians investigating Babylonian omen astrology that there were two times during the day that observations were the most important; at sunrise and sunset so any real magi, astronomer or astrologer would have been quite aware of this conjunction. In fact this conjunction as I stated earlier had been foretold 10 years in advance.

The Conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC

Planet 1 (P1)	Aspect	Planet 2 (P2)	Date	P1 longitude	P2 Longitude
Jupiter	Applying to conjunction	Saturn	17 May 07 BC	19 PI 02	20 PI 02
Jupiter	Conjunction #1 direct	Saturn	29 May 07 BC	20 PI 55	20 PI 55
Jupiter	Separating conjunction	Saturn	12 Jun 07 BC	22 PI 40	21 PI 40
Jupiter Rx	moving Rx to conjunction	Saturn Rx	12 Sep 07 BC	19 PI 52	18 PI 52
Jupiter Rx	Conjunction #2 Rx	Saturn Rx	01 Oct 07 BC	17 PI 24	17 PI 24
Jupiter	Conjunction #3 direct	Saturn	05 Dec 07 BC	15 PI 33	15 PI 33
Jupiter	Separating conjunction	Saturn	22 Dec 07 BC	17 PI 16	16 PI 16

³⁷ There are hundreds of clay tablets from Babylon and Uruk that have astronomical calculations for astrological predictions. Amazingly, four clay tablets have been found with astronomical calculations for 7 BC (Sachs and Walker 1984, 43-55). This must have been a very important year to the Babylonians because more than one tablet was found, and the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces happens once in 854 years.

³⁸ The Persian New Year is called *Nowruz*, and was at the vernal equinox.



Figure 1 – What an astrologer would have seen at sunrise on the Parthian New Year’s day – 23.03.07 BCE from the capital of Parthia located 14km from modern day city of Damghan in Iran.

But that doesn't mean they left then and there. It is more likely they would have waited until the fall when the weather began to cool in September or October. That would put them on the road during the 2nd conjunction when Saturn & Jupiter were retrograde; Jupiter and Saturn would have risen about sunset, opposite the sun and would have "appeared" to travel east to west and then to stand still in the midheaven every night as they travelled to the west.

This very well could be why the Bethlehem Star is stated as being seen “*at its rising*”:

“*We saw his star in the east [when it rose/at its rising] and have come to worship him.*” (Matt. 2:2)

“*At its rising*” is an astronomical term called acronycal rising, that means a star was directly opposite the setting sun and rising on the eastern horizon (the ascendant degree) shortly after sunset. In September/October 7 BC during their second conjunction it would have been rising right after sunset on the eastern horizon and been visible most of the night.

At sunset on any day the Sun is conjunct the descendant--on the western horizon. However, there will be only one day when the Saturn/Jupiter conjunction would be at its Zenith or Midheaven (highest point of its arc on the ecliptic) at the same time. From the beginning of December the Magi would have been watching this star approaching the Zenith night after night. The star doesn't actually stop, but astronomers would know that it can't go any higher from this point on, and thus it "stopped." This may be why the Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star because a star reaching its Zenith at such a momentous event would have

confirmed the purpose of their journey--to anoint the next King of Israel because the Zenith or midheaven of a chart rules authorities and rulers and it was located above the town they were heading for, Bethlehem.

"...after they had heard the king [Herod telling them He would be born in Bethlehem] they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was." (Matt. 2:9)

It must have been just before sunset when the Magi left Herod and headed for Bethlehem because they could see the star. If it would have been daytime the Bethlehem Star would not have been visible:

In late December of 7 BC Jupiter and Saturn would have appeared at its Zenith about sunset. Today the Hebron road lays very closely to where it was 2000 years ago & Bethlehem is only about 5,5 miles (8,2 km) south by south east of Jerusalem and walking on foot or riding a camel at a slow pace would have taken almost 2 hours to get there. Therefore, if the Magi left Jerusalem, after talking to King Herod, about 2 hours before sunset they would have arrived in Bethlehem about the same time the Bethlehem Star reached its Zenith.

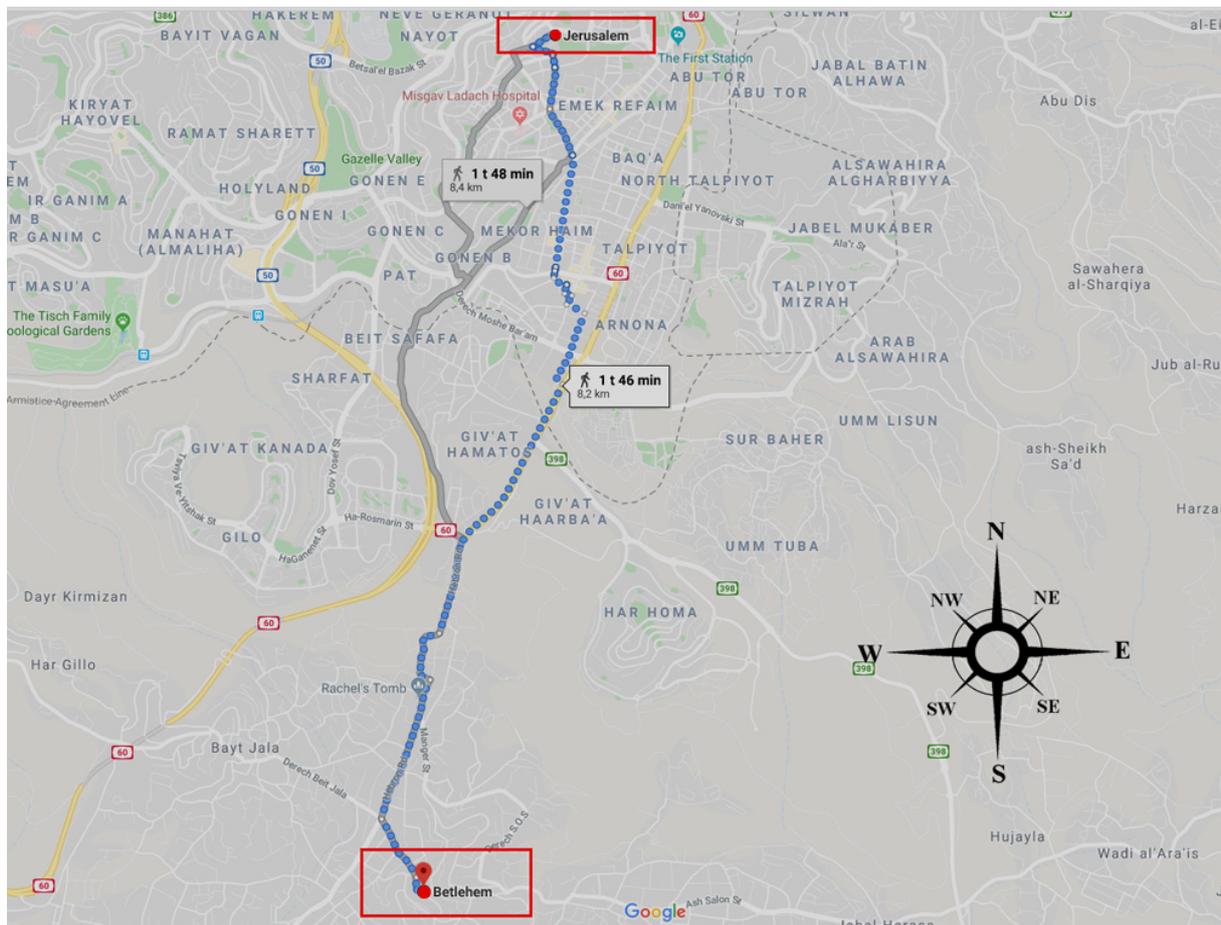


Figure 2 – The Hebron road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem

From the conjunction in the fall to the December conjunction is about 60 days which would have given Mary and Joseph plenty of time to fulfil their duties in the Temple with their new born son before leaving with the baby Jesus for Egypt after the Magi arrived and warned them about Herod.

If, say, Jupiter/Saturn were the conjoined stars, then their apparent retrograde motion during much of 7BC would have made "the star" go before anyone travelling to Israel from the East to the west simply because it would have been rising in its apparent motion from east to west. Each day as they travelled going towards the west, these stars would have risen higher and higher until they simply appeared at their zenith and set in the west leading anyone coming from the east. Also, if these magi arrived at year's end when the planet was at its zenith and hence due south, when they looked out from Jerusalem to Bethlehem their star would still have again (even more literally) been before them. And it would have been "over the place" even if not exactly "over the house" as Matthew puts it with poetic licence.

There are many reasons why I believe that it was the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter that these magi saw and in fact were able to follow over so long a period as it probably took them to travel from their country to first Jerusalem and then on to Bethlehem. This thought of course places the birth of Jesus in October or September of 7 BC.

It is always fun to speculate – but I would NOT look for some glorious heavenly chart for Jesus. I would rather tend to find one that indicated a life of suffering and eventual crucifixion as a criminal. That is what his life on earth as a man was. Read his life as told by the prophet Isaiah.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed?

For he shall grow up before him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground: he has neither form nor lordliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and left alone of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their faces; --despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and we, we did regard him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted...

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, but he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth.

He was taken from oppression and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

And men appointed his grave with the wicked, but he was with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was there guile in his mouth.³⁹

That is the "fate" he was subjected to in this earthly realm and the astrology would have to reflect that life. It would reflect his birth and then travelling into a foreign country as a small child. It would reflect his learning his father's trade. It would reflect his "blasphemy" against his own religion. It would reflect the controversy of his ministry and forsaking his family and making close friends and disciples. It would eventually show the final conflict with his religion and a violent death at the hands of the "king". It would be no kingly chart.

And so here we are in 2020 and witness the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn once again. Now it is in the sign of Aquarius, a fixed sign, Saturn's preferred domicile. Is this the

³⁹ Isaiah 53:1-4 & 7-9, The King James Bible

indication of the rise of a new world order; the great “reset”? Perhaps, God willing, I will be allowed to write something about this in the near future.

It is on one hand fitting that we see a new conjunction in this month of December, to remind us of the real reason for “Christ’s Mass”. Merry Christmas one and all.