

The Magi Came Searching

In my library I have an autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I also have a biography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. One, obviously, was written by himself; the other one was written by someone else. Interestingly enough, both of these books start off with Charles Haddon Spurgeon's birth, his early years as a child, then progress to his adulthood and years of ministry. Obviously the autobiography cannot deal with his death, but the biography does. The biography talks about how he died.

In ancient times, in Jesus' time, biographies were much different. Biographies emphasized the final years of a man's life, paying special attention to how a man died. It was felt that how a man lived his final years and how he died said more about him

and his character than anything else in his life. So when we come to the Gospels, we should not be surprised that we see almost nothing at all about Jesus' early years. We read little at all about His birth. The mere fact that Matthew

and Luke tell us anything at all about His birth should indicate to us that something very remarkable occurred at His birth. The fact they even included His birth was not routine in those days. So the fact they included anything at all about Jesus' birth is significant all by itself.

When we come to Luke, we find that in chapter 1, verse 26, he tells us about the announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary, from Gabriel the archangel. The entire description of

Jesus' birth ends in chapter 2, verse 20, with the coming of the shepherds to visit Jesus and then leaving to tell other people all that they had seen. So Luke gives us a brief synopsis of His birth, and an even briefer description of His early years.

When we come to Matthew, interestingly enough, Matthew is even briefer in his description. He uses six words to describe Jesus' birth. Matthew 1:25 says,

... but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son . . . Matthew 1:25 (NASB)

That is his description! It was really simple, "she gave birth to

a son," six words to describe His birth. Matthew is succinct. He does not care to go into detail, but Luke gave us more information. Recently I was reading a book, and the author was complaining that Matthew has a much different description of Jesus' birth than



Luke does. No, not at all! Luke just amplifies an event that Matthew treats with six words. Then Matthew proceeds to give us information that Luke does not.

MAGI WERE FROM THE EAST. Our study begins with Matthew 2:1. Here is the way the verse reads:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem,

saying . . . Matthew 2:1 (NASB)

Now we want to ask an interesting question. First, how much time elapsed between Jesus' birth and the arrival of the magi? As we are going to find out, it was about two years. So there is a gap of two years between chapter 1 and chapter 2. It is not unusual for scripture to embed time between chapters and even between verses. Scripture frequently does this. In Daniel 9:25-27 there is a huge gap of thousands of years between verses 26 and 27. It is normal for scripture to have big jumps in time. So the fact that there is a two-year gap between verse 25 of chapter 1, and verse 1 of chapter 2, is not abnormal.

Now the question is, from where did these magi come? We are told "from the east," but what does that mean? To the west there is water. But to the east there is land, people, and nations. Some early church fathers tell us that these magi came from Persia. So these magi would have traveled anywhere from 500 to as much as 1,000 miles in order to come to Jesus. Magi first appeared in the 7th century B.C. They were part of the Babylonian Empire. They were religious leaders devoted to astrology and astronomy. We believe that they were involved in the occult.

Daniel 2 gives us a lot of information about these men. In the chapter we are told that Daniel was elevated to a position of authority over the magi of his day. I cannot imagine Daniel, who was devoted to the God of Israel, not telling these men about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If Daniel would pray three times a day with the windows open for everybody to see, I just cannot imagine that Daniel would say, "Oh, I am not going to tell anyone about God." I believe not only did he tell them about the God of Israel, I believe he shared the Scriptures including about the coming Messiah. Daniel 9 prophesied that the Messiah would come.

The Babylonian Empire was eventually defeated. You can read about it in the book of Daniel. It was defeated by the Medes and Persians. Later that territory was conquered by the Empire of Greece, and that empire was defeated by the Roman Empire. The Parthenian Empire occupied most of the territory that used to belong to Persia. History tells us there was repeated conflict between the Roman Empire

and the Parthenian Empire near the time of Christ. That is important, because that tells us the magi entered into a territory that was in conflict with the Parthenian Empire from which they came.

MAGI SEARCHING FOR THE KING OF THE JEWS. Why would the magi enter into hostile territory? The answer is given to us in verse 2. In verse 1 we are told that magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem saying,

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him. Matthew 2:2 (NASB)

They came searching for the king of the Jews. They were serious. They did not come for a little Sunday afternoon stroll. I remember as a child that almost every Sunday my dad liked to get all of us into the car and drive out into the country. The magi were not taking a Sunday afternoon drive. These men had undertaken a dangerous, long trip. They did not have a vehicle. They used camels or horses and took a two to four-week trip at the minimum. It cost them money to make their trip. They had to have a military escort with them since they were entering into hostile territory. The area was also known to have robbers. More than likely, there were servants or attendants with them, somebody to cook their food, because these magi were leaders. They did not carry out menial tasks. They probably had a large group of people traveling with them. This was a long, dangerous, costly trip. These men were serious. They wanted to find Jesus. They were seriously seeking and searching for him.

Now we have to ask an interesting question. They said that they had seen His star in the East. How did they know that the star belonged to Jesus? How did they know that there was a connection? First of all, we have to remember that they were astronomers. As they were astronomers, they were watching the sky. Since they were watching the sky, they must have seen something very unusual, something very incredible, something that they had not seen before. God probably gave them something that fit their concept of what was significant for a king. Did they remember what Daniel had taught them? Or perhaps they went to Daniel 9:25-27,

where it prophesies about the Messiah. Maybe they discovered the time marker that prophesied the week in which Messiah is supposed to die. From that date, you can count backwards and estimate when the Messiah should have been born. Or perhaps they looked at the prophecies of Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17 where they refer to a star and the scepter of a king. They could have connected the star and the king together. From Daniel 9 they could have concluded that this must refer to the Messiah. We do not know how they did it, but somehow they associated the star with Jesus, the coming king of Israel, the king of the Jews. So they came to worship.

I find it interesting that they did not come for a financial deal; they did not come to create some kind of military alliance. Nor did they come to resolve a political conflict. Instead, they came to worship a baby. How many of us would search to find a baby and then worship a baby? But these men did!

Verse 3 says,

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

I find it interesting that Herod and all of Jerusalem were not troubled that the magi were there. We are told, “When Herod the king heard this . . .” The magi did not upset them. Some people say, “Oh, it was the magi, the entourage, all the people, and how significant these men were!” Verse 3 says, “And when Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

Jerusalem was struggling and troubled because the magi were searching for and asking about the king of the Jews. Verse 4 adds,

Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. Matthew 2:4 (NASB)

Herod calls a meeting of all the chief priests and scribes. Then we are told that Herod repeatedly inquired of them. This repetitive asking is missing in the English Bible. But in

the Greek it reveals he inquired and inquired. Inquired is in the imperfect tense in the Greek. It means he kept asking. He was impatient, emotional, and panicked. He wanted to know where was this baby to be born! He just cannot wait to get the answer because he wanted to kill Him.

Verses 5-6 tells us where the Messiah would be born.

**They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:
‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS
OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL”
Matthew 2:5-6 (NASB)**

They quoted Micah 5:2, and 2 Samuel 5:2. They gave Herod the answer. He was to be born in Bethlehem. Verse 7 then tells us how Herod responded,

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. Matthew 2:7 (NASB)

THE STAR OF THE MESSIAH. Verse 16 tells us how long the star appeared.

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Matthew 2:16 (NASB)

The star had been around for two years. Herod and the magi associated the appearance of the star with His birth. That means the magi had prepared, planned, and traveled for two years. These men were serious in their pursuit to find Jesus. This was not just something they had decided to do yesterday. These men were absolutely serious.

NO ONE TRAVELS WITH THE MAGI. Verse 8 tell us that King Herod claims he wanted to worship the Messiah too!

And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” Matthew 2:8 (NASB)

Herod was not serious. He was lying! Then verse 9 says the magi continued their trip.

After hearing the king, they went their way . . . Matthew 2:9a (NASB)

Notice something: the magi went to find Jesus, but Herod did not go. Did you notice who else did not go? The magi went, but not with the religious leaders. The religious leaders did not bother to go. Verse 16 tells us that when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became angry and slew all the children from two years old and down. Why did he do that? Because he did not know where the child was. If one of the religious leaders had gone with the magi, they could have come back and reported to Herod where the child was, and then he could have gone right to the place where the baby was and killed the baby. No one traveled with the magi. When the magi arrived and asked where was the child, why did not one of the religious leaders say, “I will take you there. I know where He is. Two years ago we heard about this birth, and the shepherds came up and were telling everybody about it. We know where He is, we will take you to Bethlehem, we will show you where the child is.” Why didn’t somebody do that? Even if they did not care about the child, even if they did not believe it, why did they not volunteer to go with the magi? Because they never had initially gone to check it out. They did not care. No one had gone to where this baby was.

I could not help but think, if I had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah, I would have at least wanted to tag along with these men and find out what was going on. But we should not be too surprised. The Sadducees were the liberals of the day. Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:29 that the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures. We should not be surprised that they were not interested. The Pharisees were considered to be the conservatives of the day. Many of us

say we are conservatives. The Pharisees believed all of the Old Testament. Interestingly enough, the Sadducees only believed the first five books of the Bible. They rejected the rest of the Tanakh. The Pharisees in contrast accepted all of the Tanakh or the Old Testament Scriptures.

I believe that the Pharisees are wrongly criticized because they were not just legalistic. In Luke 16:14, Jesus said they were “lovers of money.” In Luke 15:1-2 we find they did not love sinners and tax collectors. They had a heart problem. We find in Matthew 23:6 that they loved honor. I do not know if anyone here has that problem. Is there anyone here who likes recognition and honor? If somebody does not give you recognition and honor, does that bother you? If so, then you have a similar problem shared by the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:6-7 Jesus said they liked to be called rabbi or leader or teacher. They liked to have a title. Anybody here who needs to have a title?

In Matthew 23:13-38 Jesus paints a picture that these men wanted to appear to be holy. In Matthew 23:23 we are told that the Pharisees ignored mercy. They ignored justice. They were not very faithful. The Pharisees get a bum rap when we just say they are legalistic. The Pharisees had many serious sins.

Can I ask you this morning, how is your heart? Are you more like the Sadducees, or are you more like the Pharisees? Are you interested in yourself? Are you interested in honor, in recognition? Do you care about the needy? Are you faithful? Or are you just more interested in yourself than in Jesus? The Pharisees and the Sadducees were more interested in themselves than they were in finding their Messiah. The magi went to find the Messiah and no one else went with them.

Now notice what verse 9 tells us:

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them . . . Matthew 2:9b (NASB)

Did you notice something really important here? Did you notice who went first? The magi set out first, and then the star appeared. The reason that they ended up in Jerusalem is

that the star was no longer in the sky. So they did not know where to go. After they are told to go to Bethlehem, all of a sudden the star reappears to lead them. The magi have to start making their way, and then all of a sudden the star appears. I find this very interesting. Do you know what it tells me? There is a divine principle here. God waits for us to start searching for Him before we can find Him. I find it interesting that we get interested in finding Jesus when we get a really exciting book with an exciting title, from a great author. Then we start searching for Jesus. Sometimes we get it backwards. Rather than waiting for the star to appear and then starting our journey, God wants us to start our journey, and then the star will appear.

In Psalms 119:20 we are told,

*My soul is crushed with longing
After Your ordinances at all times.
Psalms 119:20 (NASB)*

Verse 24 says,

*Your testimonies also are my delight;
They are my counselors.
Psalms 119:24 (NASB)*

Here is verse 31,

*I cling to Your testimonies;
O LORD, do not put me to shame!
Psalms 119:31 (NASB)*

The psalmist is crying out from his heart. He has a desire to know God's word. There is a passion in his heart to know. How about verse 81?

*My soul languishes for Your salvation;
I wait for Your word.
Psalms 119:31 (NASB)*

The psalmist is expressing his desire to know God's word. Or how about verse 103?

*How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Psalms 119:31 (NASB)*

He describes the word as being sweeter than honey. The word of God is sweeter than honey! It is better than a star. It is better than treasure. How about verse 105?

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
Psalms 119:105 (NASB)*

And how about 129?

*Your testimonies are wonderful;
Therefore my soul observes them.
Psalms 119:129 (NASB)*

I just like that, "your testimonies are wonderful." The passion, the desire of the psalmist is that he wants the treasure. He has already found the treasure. He has already sampled the treasure. He has already tested the treasure. He already knows that it is a gold mine. But we have to start the search before we are going to find the treasure. All too often we want the treasure before we will start the search. But I do not know anybody who ever found a gold mine who did not get a pick and shovel and start to search before they found the gold. Watch this: the magi left again on their search, and then God gave them the star. God gave them a star to lead them ultimately to the treasure.

A quick side note: it says the star went on before them. The Greek word is *proago*. It gives us the picture of a star that is iteratively moving ahead. It is in the imperfect tense that the star was iteratively moving ahead, little by little. There are people today who want to try to make this some kind of a celestial phenomenon. That is not what the Greek implies. When I look up at the sky a star does not go before me. A star does not lead me anywhere. It does not go before me. But this star moved ahead of the magi, little by little, little, by little.

MAGI FIND JESUS. Notice what happens when the star arrives at the home of the child.

. . . until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.
Mathew 2:9c (NASB)

When the star arrived at the location of the child, it stopped. Now I do not know about you, but that is not any normal star that I know about. That is an abnormal star. It is a miracle of God. It was designed to lead the magi from one place to another place, to the treasure, to Jesus, the child.

Verse 10:

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Matthew 2:10 (NASB)

These magi are absolutely thrilled. Then verse 11 adds,

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11 (NASB)

I am going to stop right there. “And they worshiped Him.” Notice what verse 11 says. They came into a house. Jesus is no longer in a manger. They saw the child. The child is no longer a baby. The Greek word for child is *paidion*. It has the idea of a young child. Jesus is no longer a baby—time has elapsed.

They arrive and there is the child. They fall and worship. When it says “fell,” the Greek word actually means they fell to their knees. When is the last time you fell on your knees in prayer to God? Think about it for a minute. These men are significant leaders, and they fall on their knees. Can you just imagine? They fell on their knees and they worshipped. When is the last time you saw a leader, perhaps a religious leader, or anyone of significant caliber fall on their knees and worship? That is what these magi did. These men came to worship Jesus. They came searching. They came seeking, and they found Him.

CONCLUSION. I would like to conclude by making a few

comments. The first comment is that I believe the magi were believers. I cannot find it in scripture, and I cannot prove it to you—I just believe that they were. Why else do you come to worship? Why would someone do that? They came seeking and searching. It reminds me of Jeremiah 29: 13. It says,

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:12-13 (NASB)

Then the next verse says,

I will be found by you . . . Jeremiah 29: 14a (NASB)

Someone might say, “Well, that is talking about unbelievers.” It applies to unbelievers, but I believe it was intended primarily for believers. Think about Paul for a minute. In Philippians 3 he said that he counts everything but rubbish, dung, garbage, junk in order to know Him. Paul was already a Christian. Paul wanted to know. Paul was searching to know Him more. There is a divine principle here. We are to be searching, and we are to be seeking to know Jesus more with all our heart.

There is an interesting story that I have told before, but I would like to repeat it again. It is about a Christmas play, and the intent was to show the radiance of Jesus during this Christmas play. There was an electric bulb that was hidden in the manger, and all the stage lights were to be turned off at a particular time so that the light of the manger could glow, and all the emphasis would be on baby Jesus. The stage lights went off and there was total blackness, no lights were anywhere. The silence was broken when one of the shepherds said to the stage manager in a loud whisper, “Hey, you turned Jesus off!” Some of us, unfortunately, are like the Pharisees, so preoccupied with other things. If we have not turned Jesus off, we have sure dimmed His presence in our lives and hearts down a lot. We are more wrapped up in other things. We are not searching and hunting for Him like we used to.

I remember when I was a brand-new Christian that the most joyful thing in my heart was my spiritual hunger and

appetite. I was eager to know. I was searching, I was seeking to know Jesus and to learn all I could learn about Him. There was a flame in my heart. But you know, we can walk the Christian life and somewhere along the way allow something else to get in the way. Jesus is not that important to us anymore. Something else takes His place: other things, my personal convenience, my job, my TV, my money. We find that we are no longer seeking, and no longer searching. The magi are great examples. They risked a lot of time and a lot of money. They came searching for the king of the Jews.

May I ask you today, where is your heart? For whom or what are you searching? When you earnestly start searching and seeking for Jesus, there is treasure to be found. As the psalmist says, what you find is sweeter than honey.