

THE BIBLE  
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THE reign of Herod had nearly ended when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem and asked: "Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."  
The news that a true King of the Jews, a possible rival, was born, and that his birth had been heralded by celestial phenomena, caused Herod much concern. He summoned to him the scribes and learned men. When they were questioned, the king was to be born they answered: "In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule his people Israel." According to the authorized version of the Bible, Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed: and the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. That is the whole story of the Star of Bethlehem as it is simply and directly told in the second chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew.



It was a cloister fancy of the dark ages, handed down through centuries, that led the Christian world to regard the Star of the East as a miraculous luminary, akin to the pillar of fire that guided the children of Israel in the wilderness—a luminary especially created for the sole purpose of leading the Magi to the birthplace of Christ. The modern Christians are more apt to regard the star as a natural phenomenon and

to seek a scientific explanation of its sudden appearance; not for the purpose of casting doubt upon the narrative of Matthew, but of giving it astronomical support. Who were these wise men, these Magi, of whom St. Matthew speaks? They came from the east, they said, and the east, according to geographical knowledge of Matthew's day, was Chaldea, Persia, and that Arabian desert where the sons of Ishmael roamed. In that east which they spoke of, there are some nations a religious observation, to others a mystical traditional rite. The pseudo-science of astrology out of which our modern science of astronomy was slowly evolved was thus engendered. Exegesis of the New Testament narrative holds these Magi to have been astrologers, members of that strange, non-national, priestly brotherhood whose office it was to watch the sky each day and each night, to note the position and apparent motion of the sun from dawn to dusk, and to predict those changes in planetary positions which, in that day of astrological superstition, were supposed to shape the destinies of kings and nations. In their science came an early worshipper at the feet of Christ.

To ancient as well as medieval astrologers, certain groupings of the stars and planets had a fixed prophetic significance. These planets were named in accordance with their supposed influence. Mercury, always lurking near the sun, furtively gleaming in the morning or evening, was the patron of tricksters, knaves, and thieves. Mars, flaming in red, was the symbol of war, the guardian of heroes and warriors. If the Magi were astrologers who believed in stellar influences, the apparition of the Star of Bethlehem must have been an astronomical phenomenon. But no ordinary astronomical phenomenon could have outlasted these star-gazers from their temples. We must, therefore, find some celestial event sufficiently extraordinary to warrant a journey from Chaldea or Persia to Bethlehem.

can an exceptional stellar event near B. C. 6 with which it may be identified. John Kepler, in his peculiar genius (for he showed that the births of Enoch, Moses, Cyrus, Caesar, Charlemagne, and Luther were preceded by important astronomical events), led the way in calling attention to the astronomical phenomena that preceded the birth of Christ. He pointed out that there must have been a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn at about the time of Christ's birth, and even made a few preliminary calculations to prove his case. The conjunction occurred in the sign Pisces, from time immemorial identified with the destinies of Israel. A conjunction in that sign always signified the rising of some mighty master of the Jewish race. Such a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn occurred once in about 800 years. It was, therefore, sufficiently extraordinary in Kepler's eyes to herald the birth of a Messiah. Not until 1857 was Kepler's suggestion seriously considered by astronomers. In that year Professor Ideler, of Berlin, computed the positions of Jupiter and Saturn and proved that they were actually in conjunction in 7 B. C. His calculations showed that they at no time overlapped to form a single star, but that they were separated by a distance equal to the apparent diameter of the moon. Accordingly, Ideler had the temerity to suppose that the wise men saw the two planets as one star, because they were miraculously brightened. In justice to Ideler, it must be stated that he abandoned his theory when Encke, in 1831, repeated the calculations and found that the actual distance between Jupiter and Saturn, when next after other in B. C. 7, was more than the apparent diameter of the moon.

Apart from the fact that Jupiter and Saturn were never sufficiently near each other to be seen as one body, two planets in conjunction can hardly be called a star. Nor is it likely that experienced Chaldean astrologers would so regard it. Moreover, there were other planetary conjunctions at about the same time. Professor Stockwell has demonstrated that a conjunction of Venus and Mars occurred on May 25, B. C. 6, about fifty days less than two years before Herod's death. Because the mandate for the

slaughter of the infants was issued some time before Herod's death, Professor Stockwell advanced the supposition that this conjunction was the Star of Bethlehem. Since conjunctions occurred so frequently, it is difficult to understand why more conjunctions should have been noted than occasionally appeared that were brilliant enough to strike terror into superstitious hearts. Indeed, before the advent of the telescope, the law of Edmond Halley proved that the law of conjunction applied to the comet which bears his name and which has revisited the earth at intervals of seventy-one and one-half years. These sudden visitations are such a nucleus and nucleus of matter, these are regarded as divine messengers, a omen of good or evil, and particularly as harbingers of pestilence and war. To a people cast in the heaven for the guidance of men, comets were undoubtedly awesome visitors. Chaldean astrologers, and those who came after, no more enlightened than the medieval Christians, and it is at the fall of Constantinople in 1453 all Christendom was alarmed at the appearance of a comet which we now know to have been Halley's. It is highly probable that the Orient was no less impressed by these sudden visitations. The nucleus of dust and measuring from twenty thousand to one million miles in diameter, and a long tail which streams behind it, a nucleus of dust a hundred million miles or more, a comet is one of the most mysteriously beautiful celestial apparitions that ever meets the eye. But whether the Star of Bethlehem was such an apparition, no one can affirm with certainty. An astronomer can merely state that the idea is not untenable and that it is less objectionable than the conjunction of two planets.

Lastly, the theory has been proposed that the Star of Bethlehem was what is called a "new star" or "nova," a star which suddenly flares up in a position, at least it seems singularly fit, former magnitude after the lapse of weeks or months. Such new stars are not altogether rare. They appeared between B. C. 374 and the first of the fifteenth century. Sixteen of the fifteenth century or less than sixteen have been recorded. In our own time they are discovered with fair frequency because the invention of the telescope such new stars were studied by astronomers. Apart from the astronomical evidence in favor of the theory that the Star of Bethlehem was a nova, potentially at least it seems singularly fitting that a matchless orb blazing forth in sudden magnificence should have marked not only the birth of a Messiah whose destiny it was to save mankind by his own suffering and to make this a new world by purging it of evil, but also the birth of a new sun with embryonic planets wheeling about it in shining clouds of gas and stellar dust.

THE MARKETS.

DRY-GOODS—Market, steady and well-toned. Stearns, \$1.00; cotton, \$1.10; wool, \$1.20; silk, \$1.50; paper, \$1.80; sugar, \$2.00; coffee, \$2.50; tea, \$3.00; spices, \$4.00; oils, \$5.00; lard, \$6.00; butter, \$7.00; eggs, \$8.00; poultry, \$9.00; live stock, \$10.00; miscellaneous, \$11.00.

DIFFERENCE.

When I get to be old I ain't goin' to find it out by countin' up to see, nor by my whiskers, nor by my gums, nor none of them signs. They'll fool you, No! But one of these times I'll get throwed down, and I won't bounce back. Then I'll know it's all over. When a man gets that way, he's old. Old, see? It don't make any difference how much longer he lives after that, he don't ever get any older.—"Billy Fortune."

LIKE HAWAII AS STRONGHOLD

Experts Satisfied That Outpost May Be Relied Upon to Hold Its Own in Conflict.

After five weeks spent in testing the big guns of the various fort and posts on the island of Honolulu, the ordnance experts are pleased, and are declaring among themselves that as an outpost of the nation Hawaii is really beginning to merit the title of

like Hawaii as stronghold. The Gibraltar of the Pacific. The tests were conducted by the most important board of experts ever assembled to consider the military defenses of the island, a board to the New York Sun says.

It has been ascertained that the big guns in these are not only superbly situated for purposes of defense against all naval attacks, and particularly with reference to the great dry

dock and naval station at Pearl Harbor, now the greatest of its kind on the Pacific, but the city of Honolulu, in the harbor, which is one of the most important points are covered from attack.