

# What the Magi Knew

by Lynn Andrew

No doubt they were from Persia where Daniel half a millennium earlier would have left his writings with the Magi at Susa.<sup>1</sup> He had been made chief of the order of the Magi in Babylon<sup>2</sup> because he was the only one of Nebuchadnezzar's<sup>3</sup> advisers whose dream interpretations were reliable. Babylon fell to the Persians, and Daniel ended his career in Persia.

If Sir Robert Anderson could show that the 69 x 7 years<sup>4</sup> mentioned in the book of Daniel predict precisely when "Messiah the Prince" would present himself to Israel in his "triumphal entry,"<sup>5</sup> the Magi in Daniel's order could have done the same when the "time of the end" approached.<sup>6</sup> Deducting 30 years or so to arrive at an approximate year of his birth, they looked to the stars for a confirming sign. The conjunction of Jupiter and Venus<sup>7</sup> that took place in the year 2 BC<sup>8</sup> was what they were looking

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1. Though originally taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar II, Daniel later served under Darius and Cyrus of Persia. Susa (Shush in southern Iran) is the most likely site of Daniel's tomb. Several other cities in Iraq and Iran also claim him.

2. Daniel 4:9

3. One reason skeptics put the Bible's record of Daniel down as historical fiction is because its date of Daniel's deportation would be nine years earlier than the first invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar according to Babylonian records. But the Jews counted dates a little differently, and the Bible is consistent within itself. For example, Nebuchadnezzar became viceroy four years before his father died, which effectively moves back the possible date of his first invasion of Jerusalem by four years. Secular historians generally give preference to non-biblical records as if only modern enemies of Yahweh have reason to suppress and distort facts.

4. Daniel 9:24-27. This information was given to Daniel by the messenger (angel) Gabriel.

5. Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (the premier interpretation of Daniel's 70 weeks, first published in Great Britain in 1894; several reprints are available: the Renaissance Classics edition has the calculation on p. 43). For a concise comparison of interpretations, see John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1994), p. 106.

6. Daniel 12:9

7. June 17, 2 BC, Jupiter (the royal planet) and Venus (the mother planet) conjoined in Leo. That Herod died a year or two later, not in 4 BC as is commonly assumed, is quite possible.

8. If Jesus was born in 4 BC, as is widely believed, he would have been about two years old when his parents fled to Egypt (making good use of the gold the Magi had given them and

for, and if they were practical men too, not just political astrologers, they would not only have predicted the conjunction, they would have planned their journey to arrive in Jerusalem at least a few days ahead of those two planets coming together and forming "his star." Well, they might have.

Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah had been in existence for 700 years. He and later prophets had repeatedly foretold the establishment of a Kingdom that would rule the world from Jerusalem. But Isaiah had not given a date, nor had he provided such mysterious information as Gabriel had given Daniel by which the day of the King's entering Jerusalem could be known once the key events allowing the return of the captives to Jerusalem (enabled by the Persian king Cyrus) were known.

Evidently the Jewish rabbis had not applied this information, because Jesus reprimanded them for not having anticipated the time of his appearance.<sup>9</sup> They possessed the book of Daniel but had not pursued its meaning with enough care. Consider this: if Gabriel had given Daniel a simple date, the Romans would have destroyed Jerusalem and its temple before Jesus arrived (instead of improving them) because even Isaiah's undated prophecies must have given emperors pause to consider what they would do if the Messiah should appear in their time. Emperors deified themselves as if that would help them compete with the Jewish Savior, and they strove to keep the Jews in subjection. Wanting to be "King of the Jews" himself, Herod insinuated himself into his office and sponsored the enlarging and beautifying of the temple. Every educated person must have heard of the Hebrew prophecies, and whether they believed them or not, they would have feared that the prophets could be right about the extreme punishment coming to nations that had been unkind to Jerusalem.

So the Romans must have known of the prophesied King of Israel. In fact the world then and now knows and in one way or another denies or tries to prevent it from coming to pass. (This may be the ultimate explanation behind Rome's attitude toward Jews then and now and the world's opposition to Israel.) But the unusual political situation in Persia at that

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thereby returning a token of what their ancestors had borrowed two millennia earlier).

9. Luke 19:44

time was such that the Magi welcomed him<sup>10</sup> who would defeat Rome. Unlike Iranians today they were wise men and chose the winning side.

Many scholars believe that Daniel was not the author of Daniel and that the book which bears his name was written much later than the times in Babylon beginning about 604 BC of which it contemporaneously speaks and even later than Antiochus IV (215-164 BC) of whose conquests and end of life it prophesies (Dan. 8:9, 11:36-45). But the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) was written in the 3rd century BC, and it includes Daniel. Also quotations from Daniel appear in the *Sibylline Books* which were referenced as early as 399 BC in the Roman Lectisternium ceremony. Add to that the fact that it takes many years for a writing to rise in stature to the point where it is considered worthy of being included in the canon of Scripture. Still, liberal scholars date the writing of Daniel at 164 BC in order to deny that it predicts events that occurred before then (which would prove that God exists and speaks to men, a concept they oppose).

If the skeptics are right, and there never was a Daniel who was chief of the magicians in Babylonia and Persia, then how did the Wise Men from the East know when to expect the Messiah while his own people did not?

But apparently the Magi were unaware of the Bethlehem connection,<sup>11</sup> which is relatively obscure. Had they known, and had they gone directly to Bethlehem, all Jerusalem would not have been troubled by the strange procession, and Herod would not have killed innocents as he tried to eliminate the true King of the Jews. But then the Magi and their gifts would not have become famous, and the lucrative Christmas gift-giving custom would never have developed. Thus we have Daniel<sup>12</sup> to thank for his skeptics being unable to stop celebrating the birth of the Prince.

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10. According to Chuck Missler, Phraates IV, the king of Persia at that time was old and failing, and they were open to the possibility of the King of the Jews being their next king.

11. Micah 5:2 is where Bethlehem is most explicitly connected with the Messiah.

12. The Orthodox Church somehow got it right: they commemorate the prophet Daniel on December 17 but generally celebrate Christmas on January 7 when they can take advantage of the post-holiday sales.