



What's Happening?

More Sound Reasons

The next chapter event is Saturday, January 15, and is titled "The Language of DNA." The information, presented at a layman's level, will help you to see the evidence of God's handiwork and the problems it poses to evolutionary theory.

Join us at Highlands Community Church in Renton. There will be fellowship and food from 8:30-9:00 and presentation from 9-11. Mark your calendar!

New RTB Online Courses

Reasons Institute will offer several training courses in January 2011:

- Biblical Archeology, Dr. John Bloom
- Critical Thinking, Ken Samples
- World Religions & Science, Ken Samples
- Origin of Life, Fuz Rana
- Humans Origins, Fuz Rana

More info at www.reasons.org/learning/reasons-institute/courses.

New RTB Product

Here's a great new resource at the RTB webstore: *Impact Events - The Universe*. This study guide is designed to help youth better understand God's creation. Go to www.reasons.org/catalog/impact-events.

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The Christmas Star

By Hugh Ross (Updated 11/10)

For centuries people have wondered what kind of "star" led the magi from the East to Jerusalem in search of Israel's "Anointed One." The only known account of the wise men and the astronomical event that spurred them to action is found in the book of Matthew. This dramatic story has generated numerous articles, books, songs, and films, some of which have gained huge popularity.

Let me begin by saying that *all* explanations for the Bethlehem star, including my own, must be considered speculative, no matter how much certainty an author may claim. With such limited data to go on, even including insights from other potentially relevant biblical texts and from astronomy software, no conclusive argument can be made. That's why, as an astronomer and Christian apologist, I refrain from "proving" the reliability of the Bible on the basis of the Christmas star. An abundance of compelling evidence is available. However, I can offer what I hope are some helpful comments.



Does the story of the wise men lend credence to astrology?

In a few English translations or paraphrases of Matthew 2—the Living, New English, and Phillips—the Greek word for the magi is rendered "astrologers." A quick check of Thayer's Greek lexicon shows that the word springs from a Babylonian root meaning "oriental scientist, wise man, astrologer, or seer." That ancient Babylonian word would have been used to describe Daniel, as well as his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who served as advisors in the royal court of Babylon (Daniel 2: 48).

This word had a much broader and higher meaning than the term "astrologer" as used today. It applied to the most highly educated individuals of their time and place. As a student of Hebrew Scripture, highly respected for both his character and his wisdom, Daniel, the Jewish captive, served as Babylon's intellectual and spiritual leader. To this highly esteemed man God sent word, via the angel Gabriel, of the time when Israel's longed-for Messiah would come:

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Meet our Members



Introducing Jeannie Glenn

What do you do for a living?

Since 2006, I've been an Aflac representative, helping people stay healthy financially when they or a family member are sick or hurt. During that time, I've discovered the parallel between sales and being a Christian: reaching out to people means meeting them where they are.

How and when did you become a Christian?

I was raised by Christian parents and accepted Christ when I was eight or nine and (you've heard this story) I quit going to church when I was in college. Fifteen years later I moved to Seattle and had a desire to go to church, but it took several years to realize that God is real. Ironically, this came after a conversation with an uncle where he described his journey from pastor to secular humanist/agnostic.

How and when did you discover RTB?

My dad recorded Dr. Robert Schuller interviewing Hugh Ross and encouraged me to watch it. I was hooked and asked for Hugh Ross books for Christmas. That was in 1996. I don't have a science background so I can't explain my interest in how science and the Bible complement each other, except that it has expanded my understanding of who God is.

When did you become a part of the Seattle Chapter?

In 1998 I learned Hugh Ross was going to be speaking locally. I attended a presentation and added my name to the chapter e-mail list. I started attending chapter meetings and dialoging with the chapter leaders and, over time, became active in the chapter.

What is your role in the chapter?

I've been chapter treasurer since 2005. I also help out at the chapter table at different events.

What is your favorite pastime?

Traveling! If I had my druthers, I'd be on a plane going somewhere every six to eight weeks.

What is the most interesting thing you've done?

I lived and studied in Europe for about three years, I worked behind the scenes at a rodeo one summer, I rode on a Harley at Sturgis, I've parasailed, and I've done a ride-along with the Washington State Patrol!

In our next issue we'll highlight another member of the Seattle RTB Chapter. We hope you'll plug into the chapter and we can introduce you to our readership!

Bible & Science In the News

■ The Star of Bethlehem

This RTB article by Jeff Zweerink presents his critique of the popular "Star of Bethlehem" DVD by Christian Rick Larson. Zweerink points out the positive aspects and areas of concern, cautioning viewers to keep in mind that this is only one possible explanation. Go to www.reasons.org/controversial-topics/bible-difficulties/review-the-star-bethlehem.

■ Is Christmas a Fairy Story?

This *tothesource* article by Benjamin Wilder discusses the materialist claim that miracles are impossible and God does not exist. He argues the belief everything is governed by the "laws of nature" is contradicted by the fact we can choose, making the moral and miraculous possible. Go to: www.tothesource.org/12_15_2010/12_15_2010.htm.

■ Evidence Supports an Old Earth

RTB scholar Jeff Zweerink discusses a convincing argument from two Christian geologists that the Earth is older than the 6,000 to 10,000 young-earth creationists maintain based on the corroboration of multiple lines of evidence from from tree-ring, varve and carbon-14 data. Go to www.reasons.org/multiple-lines-evidence-support-ancient-earth.

■ Lost Civilization Under Persian Gulf

Recent findings indicate a once fertile landmass now submerged beneath the Persian Gulf may have been home to early human populations. The area may have been host to humans for tens of thousands of years and was fed by several fresh water rivers including the Tigris and Euphrates—similar to the biblical account! Do a google search.

■ Did Physics Kill God?

This article by Jay Richards in *The American* magazine discusses Stephen Hawkin's recent claim that physics proves that God did not create the universe. While Hawkin's claim is being treated as a scientific discovery, Richards says it is neither new nor compelling. Go to: www.american.com/archive/2010/november/did-physics-kill-god.

Book Review

God's Pattern for Creation

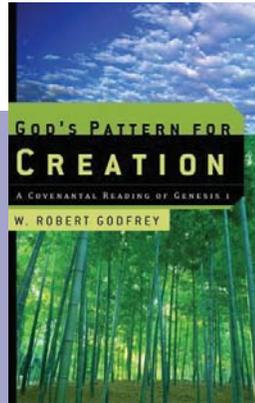
W. Robert Godfrey
P&R Publishing, 2003

Reviewer: Rick Barth

W. Robert Godfrey is a minister of the United Reformed Churches, President of Westminster Theological Seminary and frequent contributor to Ligonier ministries, headed by R.C. Sproul. To Ligonier's credit, they have allowed both sides of the age of the earth debate in their discussions and products. He has also written on Luther, Calvin, and other notable reformed issues. Dr. Godfrey presents in his book, "God's Pattern for Creation—A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1", a viewpoint that shows how appropriate understanding of the early chapters of Genesis would not point to a "literal 24-hour day" interpretation.

Godfrey focuses primarily on the literary styles and hermeneutical principles of Genesis, with substantial scriptural examples outside of Genesis to support the approach. There is no notable scientific discussion within the book which is actually a plus as often such disagreements focus too intently on scientific conclusions. It is refreshing to have a book dedicated to just scriptural interpretation. With his intent of showing a Covenantal approach, he presents hermeneutical practices with support from notable reformers and reformed creeds. Even when individual reformers may have a different conclusion on the meaning of "days", such as Calvin, Godfrey shows how such approaches still allow, if not leave you squarely in a viewpoint that sees the early chapters of Genesis with at least some level of figurative language. He also reinforces how that figurative language, even while based in a real, historical context, does not detract from the scriptures but adds to the richness of it.

Along the way, Godfrey's demeanor is very matter-of-fact and gracious. He brings in no vitriol or demeaning accusations whatsoever. His intention is to present a "responsible and faithful approach to the scriptural text, one that careful readers, even those not fully persuaded by this interpretation, would appreciate." This book should be a fine encouragement for any Christian sympathetic to an old-earth interpretation and may be a good ice-breaker for discussions on the topic with our young-earth brothers and sisters.



Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (Daniel 9:25-26).

Daniel received and recorded this prophetic revelation while serving as Chief Counsel in the Persian court. We can safely guess that the sages of Persia heard about it. According to Daniel 4:16, 23, 25, and 32, each "seven" in the vision represents seven years. This is the only detail Daniel received, but this one detail provided a critical clue for later generations.

Persia's king Artaxerxes issued the long-awaited decree (actually two decrees) to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. These have been dated at approximately 444 or 445 BC and 457 BC, though some minor dispute over possible calendar error remains. Nevertheless, this fact that Daniel's vision provides only a projected date fits the picture we see in Matthew 2. The magi knew the identity of the one they awaited and the time of his coming, but little about the place of his coming, other than it would be in Daniel's homeland.

The appearance of an extraordinary stellar event to the watchful magi confirmed that the momentous arrival was at hand. Expecting the leaders of Israel to be equally watchful, they went straight to the capital city to learn the Anointed One's location: "Where is the one who has born king of the Jews?" they asked (Matthew 2:2) The "chief priests and teachers of the law" (Matthew 2:4) informed the magi, based on Micah's prophecy (Micah 5:2), that "the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea" (Matthew 2:4-5). Imagine the travelers' surprise at the locals' apparent obliviousness to their Messiah's coming.

Rather than being led by astrology and its spurious forecasting techniques of astrology, the magi more likely represent the legacy of Daniel and his three friends—trained in all the "wisdom of the East" and eager to worship the one true God.

What might the Christmas star have been?

The Greek word aster, translated "star" in Matthew 2:2-10, has a more general meaning than the English term. It can refer to any kind of heavenly body—star, planet, asteroid, comet, meteor, or other. Most books and DVDs produced by astronomers, theologians, and laypeople about the Christmas star focus on one or a combination of these objects. The five most widely known and accepted explanations include:

1. A conjunction of planets (two planets coming close together in the sky)

2. A conjunction of a planet with a bright star
3. An "occultation" (the Moon passing in front of a planet)
4. A comet
5. A supernova

More imaginative suggestions include a flying saucer, an angel, and the Shekinah glory (the light or radiance of God occasionally made visible to humans).

Although we see aster in Revelation 1 as the symbol for a messenger, or angel, nothing in the Matthew 2 indicates a symbolic or metaphoric usage. Likewise, though New Testament references to Shekinah can be found (Matthew 17:1–3; Luke 2:9, Revelation 1:12–16), none is associated with the word aster. The "glory of the Lord" mentioned in Luke 2:9 refers to the radiance that surrounded the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, apparently seen by no one other than the shepherds. Thus, it seems reasonable to propose that the aster followed by the magi refers to an astronomical object or phenomenon.

One challenge to the supernova explanation is that such a phenomenon can be so spectacular as to be visible in broad daylight. Nearly all sky watchers everywhere would have seen and recorded it. Observers in China, India, and Egypt kept meticulous records of supernova events, and yet the Christmas star received no mention in their extensive documentation. King Herod and the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem seemed oblivious to the star (Matthew 2:1–3). The shepherds outside of Bethlehem "keeping watch over their flocks at night" on the eve of the Messiah's birth made no note of any astonishingly brilliant star (Luke 2:8–20). Perhaps they would have been less startled and terrified by the angels' visit (Luke 2:9–10) had a dazzling stellar object presaged that visit.

The explanation offered by lawyer Rick Larson in his DVD presentation encounters a similar challenge. Larson asserts that the star is a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus (the two brightest planets in the sky), a meeting so close that they merged in the sky to appear as a single object. Such an event, while brief, would have been so bright as to be visible in the daytime. Close conjunctions of Jupiter and Venus did occur in 2 BC and also in 3 BC. However, such events would have made an indelible impression on the shepherds as well as on King Herod and the Jewish religious leaders. Further, they would have been observed as two objects, rather than one aster, and as two events, rather than the same aster indicated by the text.

Another difficulty for Larson is that the dates for these two conjunctions by most scholars' calculations come too late. The best historical scholarship places the date of Herod's death at 4 BC. Further, the two conjunctions occurred only ten months apart. Herod's command to kill boys "two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the magi" (Matthew 2:16) seems out of alignment with this explanation.

Comets, too, seem unlikely candidates. They are typically

so familiar as to warrant no special response from the magi. Further, comets are so well documented throughout history that if one did occur, especially an unusually bright one, at the time of Christ's coming, it would likely show up in the records of Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Greek astronomers.

The lunar occultation explanation meets with the same difficulty. The Moon frequently passes in front of, or occults, a planet. In such an event the planet disappears from view only briefly—ranging from a few seconds up to 55 minutes. Such events seem too common and unspectacular to create a stir among the magi.

Does any other option seem plausible?

From an astronomical perspective, one remaining candidate would be a recurring nova. The nova (plural, novae) is a stellar explosion that produces a sudden increase in brightness followed by a gradual dimming (within a few months or years). This type of event lacks the brightness of a supernova and yet would be clearly noticeable to a careful observer. The brightest novae are about as bright as Polaris, the North Star.

Nova events are sufficiently uncommon to catch the attention of observers as well trained as the magi must have been. However, nearly all novae that occurred during the Roman Empire era were sufficiently unspectacular as to escape the attention of casual observers. Chinese astronomers recorded a nova in the constellation Capricorn in March–April of 5 BC, and Korean astronomers noted something in 4 BC that could have been either a nova or a comet. These two sightings are the only ones on record near the estimated time of Christ's birth.

Most novae experience a single explosion, but a rare few undergo multiple explosions separated by months or years. This repeat occurrence would seem to fit the Matthew 2 indication that the star appeared, disappeared, and then reappeared. According to Herod's murderous decree, the time separation between the first and second appearance of the star would have been somewhere between 15 and 30 months. Unlike other suggestions for the identity of the Christmas star, a recurring nova would appear and then reappear in exactly the same location on the celestial sphere.

Let me emphasize again that my suggestion represents nothing more than a possibility. Matthew provides the only record of this star, and his record gives us insufficient data to make a definitive conclusion.

How could a star guide the magi to the right house?

The King James translation of Matthew 2:9–10 says that upon leaving Jerusalem the wise men again saw the star they had seen in the east, and it "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." This wording has led many to conclude that the star must have been some kind of light beam, like a celestial spotlight,

directing the pathway to the dwelling where Jesus and His parents resided. Or, perhaps the star was moving along the route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, pointing to the house of Joseph and Mary. No known astronomical phenomenon can function in such ways, and on this basis some interpreters have suggested that the Christmas star was a manifestation of the Shekinah, or the divine radiance.

The New International translation says the star “went ahead of them [the magi] until it stopped over the place where the child was.” This wording suggests that the star may have become clearly visible as the wise men approached Bethlehem and then dimmed when they neared the house where the Joseph, Mary, and Jesus lived. Other interpretations also seem possible.

The word-for-word Greek reads, “Behold the star, which they saw in the east, went before them until coming it stood over where was the child.” The key word in this sentence is the Greek verb *histemi*, for “stood.” Its range of meaning is too broad to distinguish between illumination of a geographical route and a supernaturally timed brightening and fading. It may be worth noting that the star as first seen by the wise men did not geographically guide them, or they would have gone straight to Bethlehem rather than to Jerusalem.

Possible conclusions?

Only the Bible describes the star and the visit of the magi to the child Jesus, and only one passage in the Bible describes these events. This limitation on data indicates the need for caution in offering explanations and interpretations. A recurring nova provides at least one plausible astronomical option. Eastern scholars familiar with Daniel’s teaching and submitted to Daniel’s God seem to fit the profile of the magi.

What strikes me as the most important point of the story is its illustration of the hope the magi placed in the promised Messiah. When I consider the magnitude of their commitment of time, energy, and treasure to seeking him out in order to bow before him, I pray that my response and yours will match theirs.

*A partial list of videos and books includes *The Star of Bethlehem*, by Frederick “Rick” Larson; *Mystery of the Three Kings* by Questar Studio; *The Star of Bethlehem*, by Mark Kidger; *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the magi*, by Michael Molnar; *The Star of Bethlehem*, by Jeanne Hanson; *The Christmas Star*, by John Mosley; and *The Star of Bethlehem*, by Sir Patrick Moore.



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, God’s Word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science and the Bible.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of RTB.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, to expose them to God’s word.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

If you’re looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Or call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.