Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Who Were the Wise Men?
Scripture: Matthew 2:1
Code: 2182

Who were the wise men? Are you ready for that? Matthew chapter 2. All of us have wondered. I remember when I was a little boy I wondered who those guys were. How many were there? Were they really kings? Did they really ride camels? Why did they come to Bethlehem? And, as Paul said, we have most of our ideas about this fascinating group from the people who draw Christmas cards rather than theologians.

Vincent, who has written some very helpful word studies, says in regard to this, “Many absurd traditions and guesses respecting these visitors to our Lord’s cradle have found their way into popular belief and into Christian art. They were said to be kings and three in number. They were said to be representatives of three families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and, therefore, one of them is pictured as an Ethiopian. Their names are given as Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior.” You’ve probably heard that. And their three skulls, amazingly enough, are said to have been found. Yes, they were found “in the twelfth century by Bishop Reinald of Cologne.” The bishop dug those up and knew right off they were skulls. It’s very clear. And their eyes were still in the sockets fixed toward Bethlehem. Today, believe it or not, friends, they are on exhibit in a priceless casket in a great cathedral in Europe.

Now frankly, folks, the only thing we know about these wise men is some history and what is said in Matthew. We really are very, very limited in terms of specifics. In addition to what we have here in Matthew which is very limited, it says, “There came wise men from the East.” That’s it, folks, right there. We don’t know their names; we don’t know anything from that. But as we put the pieces together, historically, and we do have some very fascinating history.

Some of it from the Old Testament, books such as Daniel where the Magi or wise men appear in several different texts, other Bible books as well as the writings of Herodotus and other historians. We basically have found, and then here’s the basic thrust of who they were. And then we’ll get into the specifics, and I think you’ll be fascinated by it. We’re going to spend a lot of time with history tonight. This is going to be teaching not preaching. We believe they were members of an Eastern priestly group, descendant of a tribe of people originally associated with the Medes, M-E-D-E-S.

Now, I just want to remind you of something so you’ll get a little bit of a picture. Basically in the history of the world there have been four major world empires, all right? First one was the Babylonian Empire. And that, basically, was settled in the fertile crescent area east of Israel in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates River, north of the Arabian gulf, east of what we know is Israel today. That was

where the Babylonian Empire was. It was followed by the second great world empire that Daniel talks about, and that was the Empire known as the Medo-Persian Empire. It was a conglomerate empire made up of the Persians and the Medes. The Medes were a very large and powerful people. The third great world empire was Greece. When the Medo-Persian Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great, the world became Greek, as it were. The fourth great empire was the Roman Empire.

Now as we go backwards, even while the Babylonian Empire was in existence there was still Medes and Persians. So they are very ancient people. In fact, there are many people in history who trace the origin of the Medes all the way back to the time when Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, way back in the 12th chapter of Genesis. So it may well be that these are very, very ancient people. Certainly they are people who appear in the Babylonian Empire because we see them in the book of Daniel. They are people from the Medo-Persian Empire and existed on through the time of the Greek Empire and are still in existence in the Roman Empire when Christ is born.

So they are a very ancient and long-lived people were these wise men. And by the way, the word wise men…in verse 2, it says, “When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king behold there came magi.” The Greek is *magos*, *magoi*, magi. It is really an untranslatable word. It is not a translatable word; it is simply the name of a certain tribe of people. It should better be translated, perhaps, magi.

The magi were a priestly line, a priestly tribe of people from among the Medes, this very ancient and large people. They were very skilled in astronomy and astrology. This was a very great preoccupation with them. Their interest in astronomy and astrology was only part of their involvement. They were sort of occultists in a way. They had some sort of divination processes. They were involved in certain kinds of things that we would assume, perhaps, were like a sorcery and that’s why the word magi was corrupted through history into the word magic, magician, which is a synonym for sorcerer.

But the magi originally were basically a pagan, priestly tribe of people from the Medes and the Persians and there are many, many historical sources to validate this. They became interested in astronomy and astrology and the study of the stars. And in those days they didn’t make much of a separation between the superstition and the science. The science is astronomy, the superstition is astrology, and they were pretty well blended at the time. Now, what’s interesting about this is that during the time of the Babylonian Empire these magi were dwelling in the area of Babylon. They were there during the Babylonian time and the Medo-Persian Empire as well.

Now while they were there during the Babylonian Empire, they were very heavily influenced by the Jews. You remember that one of the things that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon did was take Judah into captivity. Do you remember that? That’s what Jeremiah was saying. “You are going to be taken into captivity.” Jeremiah pronounced this fact and of course even the book of Lamentations laments this reality. And they were carried off into the Babylon captivity.

Well, here in Babylon were existing these magi, and they were very high-ranking officials. By that time they had ascended to a high place in the Babylonian Empire because of their amazing intuition, wisdom, knowledge, astrology, occultic ability, whatever you want to call it, they had risen to a place of prominence. And so, immediately, they came into contact with all these Jewish people that had been brought to captivity. They also came into contact with one very specific Jew by the name of Daniel, who was elevated in the Babylonian Empire. And, consequently, they were very familiar or made familiar in the dispersion of the Jews in Babylon with Jewish prophesy regarding the Messiah. They were made aware of what was really on the Jewish prophetic plan for this One who was to come. And so that's basically who they were.

Now I want to really dig into that a little bit and set the scene for what happens in this incredible incident in chapter 2 of Matthew. Let's go back and see their history. According to the ancient historian, Herodotus, the magi were a tribe of people within a larger people called the Medes. Now listen to this. They were a hereditary priesthood tribe. In other words, they were like the Levites in Israel.

In Israel there were twelve tribes, but one of those tribes was set apart as the priestly tribe. And they were the ones who ministered in the rituals and the religious ceremonies of the temple, and they were the Levites. Well the pagan Medes had a similar thing. Of all of the tribes within the Medes they had selected one of them to function as priests in their pagan rituals. And that tribe which they had selected was the magi. Again, it's an untranslatable word, really. This is the name of that priestly group of people. It was a hereditary priesthood.

Now as I said earlier some historians see them all the way back in Ur of the Chaldees as a part of a nomadic people that were wandering about in that part of the world. Whichever is true, whether they go all the way back to Ur or whether they just first kind of surface in the Babylonian time we don't know. The point is this. During the Babylonian World Empire they were significant, during the Medo-Persia Empire they were significant, during the Greek Empire they were significant, and during the Roman Empire they were significant. And in all of those empires they maintained a place of tremendous prominence in the orient, in the east.

You see, even when the Greek Empire was in vogue, there was still certain eastern culture and power. Even when the Roman Empire was in vogue there was certain eastern power. And in both of those periods, the Magi were really the key people in the government of the East, centered in the Fertile Crescent, the area around Babylon and Medo-Persia. Now they always appear with tremendous political power. Now this is very important for you. You're going to have a little history lesson. They always appear with tremendous political power.

I would say the majority of historians, at least the ones that I read, and the ones that were referred to, see them as an eastern people who rose by virtue of their very unique priestly function. By their unique rather occultic powers of divination, by their astrological, astronomical knowledge, they rose to places of prominence. And they rose up in Babylonian government, Medo-Persian government, even in some cases in the East during the Greek period and for sure during the Roman period, to be the advisors to the royalty of the East. And that's where they got the name the Wise Men. They were the ones that were consulted about the various things that the kings and the rulers and the nobles and the princes wanted to know.

Now, we even have some history that tells us about their religious activities. Now, I'll give you a little description of the kind of religion that the Magi were involved in. Their priesthood had certain functions and here are some of the things: The principle element of their worships seems to have been fire. It's apparent from history that they worshipped or that they sort of reverenced fire. And we don't know for sure why, but perhaps they saw fire as some kind of incarnation of deity. And, by the way, they were monotheistic, they only believed, really, in one God and so they had that in common with Israel. But they looked at fire as the principle element of their worship. And in connection with that they had an altar which burned with a perpetual flame. And they believed that that perpetual flame was kindled by God from heaven.

So they had this perpetual flame altar. Now, over beside that, in their temples and wherever, they also had another altar and on that altar they offered blood sacrifice. So they actually had a blood sacrificial system. And they lit the fire to burn the sacrifice with the flame off the perpetual altar. And then when they had burned their sacrifice, this is interesting, the victim was then eaten by the worshiper and by the Magian priests.

What's fascinating about that is that's almost a direct parallel to Judaism. And you can see how way back then Satan was counterfeiting true religion from the very beginning, you see. He's always done that. You know, even today, there is real Christianity and there is phony. And in that day there was real sacrificial system with genuine worship toward the one right true God, and there was phony monotheism, phony blood sacrifice, false sacrifice, and offering burned and then eaten by the worshiper and the priest.

Additionally, these people had a hereditary priesthood. Again, a counterfeit of the Levitical priesthood. These people carried about small bundles of divining rods in their garments, and they used these divining rods for their little ceremonies. Not unlike the Urim and the Thummim of the priests, the high priest, by which the knowledge of God was sought. They believed in the distinction of certain kinds of unclean animals. That's interesting. They believed that certain insects and certain reptiles were unclean. Again, this is an interesting parallel to what God truly revealed to Israel. And another thing that I felt very interesting as I was reading about it was they were very ritualistic about ever touching and disposing of a dead body, another thing common to God's standard for Israel. So in the

Babylonian Empire this very interesting religious group of people appears. And they rose to tremendous prominence.

In Jeremiah 39:3 in verse 13, a man by the name of Nergalsharezer is mentioned, and Nergal-sharezer is the chief of the Magi in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Okay? These oriental kings starting with Nebuchadnezzar had elevated the Magi, and even before that. But as far as the Scripture is concerned, we see them first with Nebuchadnezzar. They had elevated this priestly group from the Medes to the place of being the official advisors to the king. And so they are tremendously powerful people. And even when Babylon fell and the Medo-Persian Empire came in and you have great rulers like Cyrus and others, you still have the high-ranking officials of the Medo- Persian government being taken from this group called Magi. They were unmatched in political power.

Now I want you to turn in your Bible with me for a minute, back to Daniel, and I want to show you how they appear in the book of Daniel, Daniel, chapter 2. When I get all done with this and you re-read verse 1 of Matthew 2 it's going to make a lot more sense. Daniel chapter 2 in verse 10 and we won't take time to set all the context. But here we are in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel is there, the Jews are in captivity in Babylon, and it says, "The Chaldeans answered before the king and said, 'There is not a man on the earth that can reveal the king's matter: therefore, there is no king, lord, nor ruler that asked such things of any Magi or astrologer or Chaldean.'" And it's very likely that those are all synonyms. And then astrologer and Chaldean may just be other ways of saying the same thing.

So here we find the word Magi, it's not strictly the word magician, that's an English corruption it's the word Magi.

It's talking about this priestly tribe. They had a very prominent place at that time. They were known as those who could interpret dreams. Now you remember Nebuchadnezzar had this bizarre dream and none of them could handle it. New you know what's so fascinating about it is there was one man who could interpret it. You know who that was? It was Daniel. And let's go on a little bit, Chapter 4 verse 7. We again see the Magi. Chapter 4 verse 7, "Then came in the Magi, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, the soothsayers, and I told the dream to them but they didn't make known unto me its interpretation." Verse 9, "O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians." Now here we meet the master of the Magi.

And I'm just trying to point out that they are mentioned repeatedly in the book of Daniel. And rather than call them magicians, they should be Magi. That's essentially what he is referring to. Now when Daniel came along and all these Magi who were in the high, high-ranking place of advisors to the king couldn't give any answers, Daniel could, something amazing happened. Daniel 5:11, "There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods was found in him" – talking about Daniel now – "Whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king I say, thy father made master of the Magi."

Now how interesting. Daniel was so adept at telling the dreams of the king that the king made Daniel the master of the Magi, so that Daniel was literally in Babylon the chief over this whole priestly group. Okay? It's fascinating. Now, that puts Daniel in the tremendously unique position of being able to dispense to these Magi all of his information about the Old Testament, which without a shadow of a doubt is precisely what Daniel did. We know that Daniel was a man of God. We know that Daniel was a man totally devoted to worship and expression of his faith because he wound up in a lion's den because of it, didn't he? And there's no question in my mind but that Daniel and the other godly remnant in the Diaspora, the dispersion, shared their knowledge of the Old Testament and their copies of the Scripture with these people in Babylon.

And, additionally, when the final decree of Cyrus came that they could go back to the land the majority of the Jews never went back. The majority of the Jews stayed in Babylon, intermingled, intermarried, and throughout the remaining history of Babylon and Medo-Persia there were people in the noble families, people in the high-ranking offices, some say even monarchs in that part of the world who had part Jewish blood. And certainly we would have to conclude that Daniel had a profound impact in the dispensing of that information. And, by the way, I want to add another footnote to this, that as I was studying, this was very fascinating to me because I began to think about this. If Daniel was so good at winning these Magi over and convincing them about this fact of the coming Messiah, why was it that they plotted against him and threw him in the lion's den, if he was so influential and believable?

And so I began to study, and the sixth chapter of Daniel revealed a most interesting thing. You don't need to…we're not going to go all through it. But this, in the sixth chapter of Daniel we find a plot against Daniel based on jealousy. But what is really amazing about this plot is that it is not a plot devised by the Magi who dominated the hierarchy of the royal court. It is a plot developed by men known as the satraps, and I don't mean SET. I mean SAT, satraps. That was the term used to describe the regional governors who had nothing to do with the palace. So remember, the plot that was hatched in jealousy against Daniel was not a plot hatched at the hands of the Magi. Which, again, leads me to see that very likely Daniel was extremely believable and convincing in his impact.

In fact, do you realize that when Daniel was actually being thrown in the lion's den, the king said, "Daniel, I know that your God will deliver you." You remember the king actually said that? He was so convinced of the power of God through the testimony of Daniel. And I'm sure he just checked it as often as he possibly could to see that that anticipation was in fact a reality. So, the Magi kept their place of prominence, influenced, no doubt, by such a great man as Daniel, and there were few who ever lived like him, influenced by Godly Jews in the dispersion, influenced by the intermarriage and the constant Jewish culture that was imposed upon them in many ways. And they became and maintained a position in the Medo-Persian Empire of great power in the court of the king.

Now let me tell you something else interesting. In the sixth century B.C., there was a great king of Persia by the name of Darius, Darius the Great. This is in the Medo-Persian Empire. This is right around the time of Daniel. And Darius came in and Darius said, “I am going to establish a national religion.” And you know which one he picked? Zoroastrianism. Now we don’t have time to go into Zoroastrianism, but Zoroastrianism had with it a lot of astrology. And it may well be that the final little nuances of astrology and the preoccupation of the Magi with that, came in the merging of Zoroastrianism. So, now what you’ve got, you’ve got these Magi who have their own culture religion. On top of that has been superimposed Judaism, and on top of that has been superimposed Zoroastrianism. Now that’s really a can of worms, to put it mildly.

But what’s so interesting is the Magi was so anxious to maintain their political power, and they were so anxious to maintain their religious power that when the decree came from Darius that Zoroastrianism was the religion that was going to exist, they just slid right in and said, “Fine with us,” and they made some adaptations. But now what you’ve got is very interesting. You’ve got the Magi all gobbled up here. And you’ve got some of them, no doubt, committed to Zoroastrianism as time went on, some of them committed to ancient Magian formulas and some of them maybe believing, honestly in their heart, that the God of Daniel was the real God.

And so this is the key. As history moved on from here, the Magi began to depart from a singular commitment to their historic religion, and they began to find their way into different things. Some maybe leaning toward Zoroastrianism, some toward the ancient magianism, and I believe in my heart that some, like these Magi that show up at the birth of Christ, were really true seekers of the true God. And so that gives you a little bit of the background.

Now, I’m going to talk some more about this history. The Magi were so powerful that historians tell us that no Persian was ever able to become king…now watch this one…never able to become king except under two conditions: One, he mastered the scientific and religious discipline of the Magi. Two, he had to be approved of and crowned by the Magi. Now that’s something. That’s power. Do you know what they called the wisdom of the Magi? They had a name for it. The name for it was this. The law of the Medes and the Persians. That law was the law or the code defined by the Magi. And if you want to see that phrase it’s in Esther 1:19 and Daniel chapter 6 a couple of times. The law of the Medes and the Persians was the code, the scientific religious discipline of the Magi. And their wisdom was that which was required for anyone to be a monarch in Persia. Additionally, historians tell us that they controlled the judicial office as well as the kingly office.

In Esther 1:13 we have the indication that the royal bench of judges was all chosen from the Magi. Man, they were powerful. And you have to remember when you talk about the Persian Empire and the Median Empire and the Babylonian Empire, you are talking about control of the Orient. This is a massive empire. And in the Babylonian time and the MedoPersian time, they literally controlled the

known world. These were powerful men. And they were not only responsible for making every monarch that was made in that era, but they were responsible for setting up the judges as well. They had a check system for the despotism that could grow out of a kingship, and so they were the judges that counter-balanced the dictator king. History tells us they knew astronomy, they were very good in mathematics, they knew natural history, they were good at agriculture and architecture.

And do you remember back in…I think it's Acts 7 that talks about the fact that Moses was raised up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians? Same thing was true of anybody who was raised in a nobility in the East. They were raised in the law of the Medes and the Persians, all nobility raised by them. And they were the kingmakers. They were the kingmakers, and no one ruled at all apart from them. Now, as I mentioned earlier on of their special skills was interpreting dreams. And when they failed to do that and Daniel moved in on top of it and became the chief, as we saw in Daniel 5:11, the setup was made by God to set the scene for Matthew chapter 2, hundreds of years before Jesus was born, six hundred. God was setting up the situation for a great Hebrew prophet to rule a group called the Magi so that one day when a baby was born in Bethlehem, some of those Magi would find their way to the house where the baby was. That's planning history.

So the syncretistic hybrid religion of the Magi very much like Judaism, monotheistic and a hereditary priesthood, blood sacrifice, believed also in supernatural revelation, believed in prophecy, these common things sort of made Judaism an easy thing for them to accept. And I believe in my heart, and this is just what I believe because of what I see happen in Matthew 2. I believe that apparently there were some God-fearing gentile Magi historically existing in that eastern part of the world.

Now I want to move to the time of Jesus. Look with me at Matthew 2. Time has gone on, century after century until Jesus is to be born. Somehow and by some marvelous way God has managed to maintain some true seeking Magi. Most may be corrupted. Certainly, many corrupted, and we'll meet a few of the corrupt ones that are in the New Testament. But there were some real ones. There were some like Cornelius, you know, God-fearing gentiles. There were some like Lydia, a God-fearing gentile. There were some back there in that part of the world, some from the Magi, high-ranking kingmakers in the great Empire of the east. There were some at that time who were still waiting for Daniel's great hope to be fulfilled, you see.

Now let me set the stage. Politically speaking, Rome was scared of the Eastern Empire. Now if you'll just focus in your mind a little map of Europe and that was the Roman Empire, this massive chunk of Europe. And technically it swept to the east. But by virtue of distance, across the Mediterranean, across the blazing desert to get to the east, there was a certain isolation in the east which caused Rome a lot of anxiety. And they were always fearful that what then became known as the Parthian Empire, the Eastern Empire made up of the Medes and the Persians and the old Babylonian territory, that Parthian Empire was always kind of an anxiety for Rome.

Rome, you know, had stretched its tentacles out as it were to rule the world but they never really felt very secure about the Parthian Empire. And they had become violent enemies, violent enemies. And they fought. In 55 B.C. they fought. In 40 B.C. they fought. And what's fascinating is, you know where they always fought? The great empire in the west, the great empire in the east came together and guess where they always fought? Right along the coast of the Mediterranean, Syria, Jordan, Palestine. Israel was a little no man's land between the powers of the east and the powers of the west. Now Rome was afraid of them. And if you look at verse 3 of Matthew 2, it says, "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was," what? "Troubled." When he heard that Magi, oriental, Parthian kingmakers had arrived in Jerusalem he was rattled. And we'll see more about that in a few minutes.

Now, let me tell you a little more about what happens. By the time we get to the time of Christ the Magi are still in tremendous power in the east. Some of them used their power, their position, their skills, with a great amount of human wisdom. Some of them just really turned into awful people. Like any scientist, any priest, any preacher any other skilled person of modern days, we can either apply our craft deceitfully or we can apply it honestly. Some of the Magi were honest and they exalted the craft of wisdom and political advice. Some of them were corrupt and they prostituted it. Both kinds were vary common in the Mediterranean era when Christ was born.

Let me introduce you to a couple of corrupt ones. Turn in your Bible to Acts 8. Acts 8, verse 4. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word," Acts 8:4 says. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them, and the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." And it tells all about those. And you come to verse nine. "But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one." Some great one. "To whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest saying, 'This man is the great power of God.'" Now here is Simon, Simon Magus if you will, Simon the Magi. And here is a man who has prostituted his position into deceit as it were; he has sold himself to Satan. He used sorcery. You notice that? The root of that word is Magi, *mageu*, in the Greek. He used his Magi art in a prostituted manner.

And later on he tried to buy the Holy Spirit and Peter really lays him out. He says in verse 2O, "Your money perish with you, you have," – verse 21 – "neither part nor lot in this matter." Verse 22, "Repent of your wickedness." Verse 23, "I perceive you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Boy, oh Peter didn't mince any words. Look at the 13th chapter of Acts, Acts 13:6. "And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos," and this is, of course, Paul and Barnabas starting on the first missionary journey. And they're in Cyprus, the little island there in the east coast of the Mediterranean, "the isle of Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus." And it goes down in verse 8 and it says "Elymas, the sorcerer." The Greek is Elymas

the *magos*, Elymas the Magi. Here's another one who also has prostituted this craft, prostituted this strange pagan religion in order to seek the ends of Satan. And of course, he tried to mess up Paul. And Paul says, "Oh, full of all deceit and mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of righteousness. Will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord and now behold the hand of the Lord is upon you," – verse 11 – "and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. Immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Paul dealt with this one.

And you see both Simon and Elymas were brought into the bondage of Satan himself who is the god of all astrologers and the god of all sorcerers. And, frankly, these were the kind of people that made intelligent folks in the Roman Empire despise such sorcerers. Philo the Roman says, "They are vipers, they are scorpions and they/other venomous creatures." You see, these were the kind of people, the kind of Magi the Romans despised. But in the east, as I said, they were tremendously powerful men. And some among them, no question in my mind, were genuine men.

Now at the time of Christ, at the time of Christ in the Eastern Empire, there was a ruling body called the Megistanes. You don't need to…that's not going to be on the quiz so you don't need to worry about. But there was a ruling house called the Megistanes, and those…this would be like the United States Senate. Okay. That's just a name, Megistanes. And this ruling house ruled in the Parthian-Persian Empire at this time. Now listen, it was totally composed of Magi whose duty it was, now watch this, to have absolute choice for the selection of a king. They were kingmakers. And you know what happened? They had some real problems with the king that they had. They wanted to fight Rome and knock off Rome. But they had a loser for a king, Phraates the Fourth. And Phraates the Fourth had been deposed. And listen, the Magi were looking for a new king, a new king of the east, a new king of the Eastern Empire who could come against Rome.

When they arrived in Jerusalem Herod knew what was going on. They were kingmakers and when they wandered around town saying, "Where is this new king of the Jews?" Herod got panicky. When suddenly these Persian kingmakers appeared in Jerusalem, no doubt traveling in full force with all their oriental pomp. And they use to wear conical hats with points on the top and big deals clear down to the bottom of their chin, and they rode Persian steeds not camels. And when they came in they didn't come alone. The estimates of history are they came with Persian cavalry. When they came charging into the city of Jerusalem and Herod peeked out his little palace window, he flipped. These are powerful men, and to make it worse his army was out of the country on a mission. And the Bible says Herod was troubled. I guess he was. The word in the Greek is he was agitated like your washing machine, he was shaking.

You see, Herod had a title. You know what Herod's title was? King of the Jews. He got it from Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus crowned him king of the Jews. And he realized the great dream of his life was to get that little buffer state under his power, and here he was in the middle of two huge

contending empires. And all of a sudden this massive coterie of Persians arrive in the city and he is panicked. And they say, “We’re coming to find the new king.” Now at the time Herod was close to death. And Caesar Augustus was really old and hanging by a thread. And since the retirement of Tiberius the Roman army didn’t even have a commander-in-chief. And they knew that this would be the time to bring about an eastern war against the west. It was right. And so Herod was shaking.

You say, “Well, what were the Magi thinking?” I don’t know. Maybe, they had looked at it politically. Maybe they thought, “Oh, man, here comes the king.” And I think that that’s probably true but additionally I think they looked at it spiritually. Because when they got to that little room in Bethlehem, the Bible says they worshipped Him. They saw more than just a king. I believe they saw the Messiah they had heard about from the days of Daniel. I think we have God-fearing, seeking gentiles. And it was two-fold. I’m sure they were thinking, “Maybe this is the Savior, the Savior who is called the Anointed One,” which is a term describing a king. “And maybe He will not only be the Savior, the Messiah, but maybe He will be the one who will gather all this people of the east together and go against the oppression of Rome.” By the way, the Magi knew that the people of Israel were on their side, not Rome’s. And so that’s why they came into town and started asking the people where this new king was. They thought the people of Israel would be just as excited as they were. But you see the people of Israel were blinded by their unbelief.

Isn’t it fascinating to you? It is to me, that the first people in the world to recognize the arrival of the King were gentiles. Gentiles. Does that tell you something about history? “He came unto His own and His own,” what? “Received Him not.” And Matthew follows that all the way through. The rejection of the King. Could this be the invincible monarch? They could crown Him. They could take Him back and they could make Him king and they could unify the east. And with this great Messiah that Daniel had prophesied they could go against Rome with invincibility. And so into Jerusalem rides the group of Magi, kingmakers of the east on their fine Persian steeds, escorted by mounted cavalry. And so the stage is set. What happens after this? Come back next week. We don’t have time.

Let me close by saying this. Isn’t it exciting to you how God controls history? Does that excite you? Now see, you looked at everything I said and you listened to it. And I talked to you for fifty minutes, and you know why it was so fascinating to you? Not because it was just a bunch of historical facts, but because you were seeing God at work. History is His story. Long ago He picked out a man named Daniel, put him in a place to influence some men who would arrive in perfect timing. You say, “Well, why does Matthew present this? Why?” Listen. Matthew, all the way through his gospel is trying to tell the world that Jesus Christ is what? King. And just to make sure nobody misses it he has the most famous kingmakers in the world come and bow down at His feet. Do you see? It’s all a part of Matthew’s strategy. He’s the king. And if Israel isn’t going to acknowledge it, then God is going to drag a bunch of people from Persia to acknowledge it. He’s king.

God has master planned history. And the sad part of it is that the people who should have known, the people who should have known missed it. And the people from way off, who should have never guessed, showed up and worshipped. That's history. Jesus came. Paul said, "To the Jew first, also to the Gentiles." Jesus came and said, "I'm come not but for the lost sheep for the house of Israel." Israel turned its back on Christ and He called a people from a no people. "He reached out to the Gentiles," Romans says, "and grafted us in." And the hint of that was right here in the very beginning. Remember what it says, if…the Bible says if we don't praise Him, what? The very rocks will cry out. And when the king arrived, beloved, when the king arrived, if His people wouldn't praise Him then God will make sure that there's somebody there to do it and there was.

And you know in our world today they celebrate Christmas, pass around the Christmas cards, look at the wise men. They don't understand the point. They don't know the meaning. They don't see who He is. But here and there, hither and yon, some of us do. Right? And there's some of us who bow to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Next week we're going to discuss Herod, what kind of a man he was, and why he panicked. And I'm going to tell you what the star was that led them to Bethlehem. Let's pray.

Father, it's just really…it's just beyond us to see how You work in history. With our little finite minds, we look at things and we think we understand and then we dig deep and deeper and deeper and, all of a sudden, we discover a world we never knew existed, a world of information a world of insight that expands in our minds Your incredible greatness, Your unequaled power and wisdom. God, I thank You for the wise men, the Magi, however many there were and whatever their names were, who were seeking the King. And I feel grieved in my heart for the people of the King who didn't want him. And I would pray, Lord, tonight that in our fellowship there are some who have been like the people of the King and turned their back on Him and said, "I don't want Him." "We will not have this man reign over us," they said. Father, I pray that You convict their hearts. They be like those who came from afar and rejoiced with great joy and fell down and worshipped Him. Thank You also that You planned us to be a part of the church that bows before Him in worship. We'll give you praise, Lord, for all that You have done that shows us Your mighty hand in Jesus name. Amen.

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