

**Series: Christ The King Is Born #1860**

**Title: *Matthew 2; Daniel 2***

***Daniel's Magi, Matthew's Magi***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. In the second chapter of Matthew, the opening Book of the Bible's New Testament, the second chapter and verses 1-3 we read this, **"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> '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.' <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."**

As a way to outline our discussion, we have talked about the coordinates and the contrasting kings and now we are onto the coming of the magi. The coordinates are the locations in which this story takes place. The contrasting kings are Herod and Jesus. Herod is the human king. Jesus is the God King. We talked about Herod and will come to Jesus in greater detail soon. And this week our focus is on the coming of the magi. Last time and continuing on into today, I want to give us a little history lesson by piecing together various texts from the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) as well as from ancient history as to who were these magi.

And I trust you remember we visited the Old Testament Book of Daniel so that we could see what historical data the Bible itself gives us on the magi who are sometimes called "wise men." If you have your Bible handy now, please find your place again in Daniel and this time at chapter 2. (That's Daniel 2.) Daniel is an extraordinary man. In 605BC Babylon conquered Jerusalem and exiled Daniel as well as many others. Well, Daniel (reminiscent of Joseph) far away from his home country and city, he has a great gift bestowed upon him by God. That is, Daniel can interpret dreams. And not just anyone's dreams, but the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Babylonians and their empire.

Let's follow along, at least part of the true, historic record as found in Daniel chapter 2. I will begin reading at verse 1. Again, this is Daniel chapter 2. **"Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. <sup>2</sup> Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. <sup>3</sup> The king said to them, 'I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream.'" Let me pause the reading here so I can tell you that the "magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers" are other names for the magi. Earlier in this series I said the magi understood and performed in the occult. We even get our word magic and magician from the word magi. So the "magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers" are the wise men. And, as we said last time, they are very influential in the life of the King.**

Well, these magi or wise men could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream and so the king flew into a rage. I am reading now down in verse 12 of this second chapter of Daniel. Daniel 2.12 and 13 reads, **"Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. <sup>13</sup> So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain..."**

OK, so these wise men are about to be dead men, but just then a somewhat unlikely source intervenes. He is Daniel. I continue in Daniel chapter 2 now at verse 14, **"Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon; <sup>15</sup> he said to Arioch, the king's commander, 'For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?' Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. <sup>16</sup> So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king."**

Daniel has made a request of the king, via the captain of the king's bodyguard. The request: allow me, Daniel, to interpret your dream, King Nebuchadnezzar.

As we read on we learn that this request is granted. Daniel seeks the Lord in prayer. He invites the prayers of his fellow Jewish friends who are with him to ask God to give Daniel the interpretation of the dream so that the wise men of Babylon would not be executed. And God faithfully answers these prayers.

Verse 19 says, **“Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.”** God gave Daniel the correct interpretation and while we do not have time to read the meaning in this dream, it is amazing. It deals with the rise and fall of multiple world empires. And history supports everything God revealed to Daniel and Daniel reported to the King. Things worked out exactly as the Lord revealed they would.

But I want to read verse 24. Here, Daniel makes a second request of the King. His first request was to be allowed to interpret the dream. His second request was this. Daniel 2.24, **“Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: ‘Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king’s presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king.’”** Importantly, what this tells us is that Daniel saved the lives of the wise men of Babylon, and as a result the wise men (the magi) respected Daniel and held him in high regard. Remember, just in case there is any confusion, the plot against Daniel in Daniel chapter 6 – the threat of the lions’ den – that plot came from the satraps and commissioners, not the wise men.

Perhaps you are following along and you’re thinking, “OK. I see what you are up to here, Swallow. You are showing us the role of the magi/the wise men in the life of the Babylonian King. These were men of prestige and political clout. And you have also demonstrated that these ancient wise men liked Daniel and were forever indebted to him because he intervened to save their lives. *But*, what has all this to do with the magi that come to Jerusalem all those centuries later upon the birth of Jesus Christ?” Good question! Thank you for asking it. I will answer this by asking a question in the return.

How did the magi of Matthew 2, before they left Parthia/Persia to come to Jerusalem, how did they know there would be born the One who is the King of the Jews? As the writing of some famous historians, men like Tacitus, and Philo of Alexandria, and Josephus reveals, there was a great expectation at the time of Christ’s birth for the appearance of someone notable. No doubt the learned magi heard of this. Second, the magi may have read the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and if so they would have known of the prophecies of the coming Messiah of the Jews. Both of these may well be true.

But, the biggest reason (besides the star that will guide them – we will get to that!), the reason the wise men of Matthew 2 knew about the One born King of the Jews, He is Jesus, is because of what Daniel and other Jews, in exile in Babylon, taught the magi about the coming Messiah and King. John MacArthur summarizes this nicely in his commentary on Matthew. I am quoting him now, “Because of Daniel’s high position and great respect among them, it seems certain that the magi learned much from that prophet about the one true God, the God of Israel, and about His will and plans for His people through the coming glorious King. Because many Jews remained in Babylon after the Exile and intermarried with the people of the east, it is likely that Jewish messianic influence remained strong in that region even until New Testament times (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, 28*).” End quote.

Amazing, isn’t it, how God providentially works all things together? There is a deep and penetrating, if you will think about it, connection between the life of Daniel and what God did through him in Babylon, and these magi who come from the east, where the Babylonians once ruled, to visit Jesus in the house with Mary His mother and Joseph His earthly father in Matthew chapter 2. The Old Testament and the New Testament are a sweeping tapestry all woven together, as we see when we flip the tapestry over and study the back. What Daniel and other Israelites passed along to the forefathers of these magi then got passed down all the way to the magi who came from the east. I trust you see the connection.

I have more I want to say about the magi, but I think that is enough for now. Plus, the clock is reminding me to soon wind down. Matthew says, “...magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘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.’” These are potent verses. And they remind us that if ancient pagan peoples like the magi could have hearts bent towards Jesus the King, then so can the ungodly today.

Maybe you know someone who is in the occult, into magic, and astrology? Pray for them. And share with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. God, who is merciful, may yet save them. Join us next time because God Is!

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