

# Wise Men: Molded by Prophecy

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

Written By: Pastor John T. Anderson

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God's love for us is so great that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world that we might be saved. This was accomplished through a miracle birth, an unprecedented pregnancy, that Jesus might be fully Man and fully God. Though we know He wasn't born in December, we're glad that some attention is given to this wonderful event, and pray that the lessons He has for us in the Savior's birth will be impressed on our minds. Included in the story of His nativity is the account of the Magi who came to visit Him, bearing their gifts.

The message on a bumper sticker says, "Wise men still seek Him." The Word of the Lord comes to us today from the story of the wise men who sought Him at His birth and how their lives were shaped by Bible prophecy. The wise today will also find that their lives will be molded by the truths of Scripture and the message of prophecy.

We read in Matthew, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He Who is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'" Matthew 2:1, 2.

These seekers came at His birth from the east; seekers came from the west at the close of His life. Nearing the end of His ministry, during the last week of His earthly life, John reports, "Now there were certain Greeks (that would be from the west, obviously) among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" John 12:20, 21.

The wise men from the "east" are often pictured as being three. We don't know that for certain; it is deduced from the fact that there were three gifts given to the infant Jesus. The word "wise" men in the original is not the usual word that would be translated "wise," which would have been "sophos" (compare "philosophy" and "sophomore"), but was the word "magos" (from which we get "magician") which described the Persian class of priests and astronomers. In the New Testament, this word is found only in Matthew 2 and in Acts 8, which tells the story of Simon "Magus," the sorcerer who thought he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money. In the Old Testament, it is the word which appears in the Greek version of Daniel 2, concerning the wise men who served in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The wise men of Matthew 2 were “descendants” of the wise men of Daniel 2. They were interested in science, astronomy and philosophy. It is evident that these wise men were also students of the Scriptures and were seekers of divine truth. So it was that they observed in the heavens a luminous body for which they had no explanation, which led to an encounter with the Lord.

This was not the first time God used this tactic of curiosity in the unexplained to engage the interest of someone. Fifteen centuries previously an exiled shepherd, who had been given instruction in science and learning, came upon a luminous sight which defied reason. Moses approached a burning bush and the message he heard there changed his life.

From where did the wise men of the east obtain their knowledge of prophecy? Following the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, just before they were to enter Canaan, a prophet by the name of Balaam uttered his fourth oracle concerning the “Coming One.” He stated, “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Numbers 24:17. The prophet Balaam was himself from “the east,” so it is reasonable to believe that his message was preserved and made available to these wise men who lived in the east centuries later. From his prophecy, the wise men found significance in the word “Star” as they viewed this unexplained heavenly body of light. From the word “Scepter” they concluded that this prefigured One of royal lineage, and therefore asked, “Where is He Who is born King of the Jews?”

Secondly, the prophet Daniel, as he was serving in the courts of Persia, was given visions relating to the coming Messiah, the study of which would lead to an understanding of the time period of His arrival. With keen interest the wise men would have pondered the Scripture, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” Daniel 9:25. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they would have been able to discover the date of the command of Artaxerxes, the Persian monarch who issued the command in 457 B.C. which brought full restoration to the Jewish way of life. They would have, by divine guidance, discerned that these prophetic “weeks” must have stood for a symbolic period of time, even a “day for a year,” for most certainly they could not have been meant in a literal way. God’s method of giving information may not be the way that we might have thought of, but it is the best. It is designed to appeal to the heart that is searching for wisdom, while those who are superficial in their quest for heavenly wisdom will pass it by as not valuable. This is the reason the prophecies were encoded in symbols and signs. “None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.” Daniel 12:10. Some might say that the information that prompted the journey of the wise men was sketchy and ambiguous, but they, convicted by the Holy Spirit, found it adequate to act upon.

Here’s a question to think about. If you and I had lived back then and seen an unusual light in the sky, would we have connected it with a fifteen-century old prophecy of a renegade prophet, “A Star will come out of Jacob,” and would we have been prepared to travel many hundreds of miles

to investigate what this was about? Would we by faith have loaded our camels with gifts to give to the One Who would hold a scepter? They did! It was indeed God's truth that moved upon their hearts and changed their lives. They were about to meet the Messiah. They were to be shaped by the prophecy.

The Lord needed to teach Peter that the Gospel was to be given to all, no matter what their ethnic origin. This was not the way he thought at that time. Peter had been brought up to understand that salvation was restricted to those who could trace their family tree back to Abraham. How would the Lord wake Peter up from this imperfect understanding? Would you, if you were given this task, have ever designed the method God used? Would you have thought of sending him a vision with a sheet containing all kinds of unclean animals with the command, "Rise and eat." This vision was given to him three times. Wouldn't there be risk in giving the message in this way? Wouldn't some take this to mean that the restrictions against unclean meat were now lifted?

Peter himself wondered at the meaning of these three visions, but when there was a knock at the door and visitors from Cornelius, a soldier of Italian descent, requested the presence of Peter to share with them the truths of the Gospel, Peter discovered the true meaning of what God had shown him. What was his reaction to the vision of the sheet containing unclean food, accompanied by the command, "Rise and eat. What God has cleansed you must not call common"? Acts 10:15.

Do we read that Peter went down immediately to the town's butchery and stocked up on a large supply of pork products? No, that's not what Peter understood this vision to mean. He said to those who had gathered to hear his words, "God has shown me (a clear reference to the vision) that I should not call any man (not animal) common or unclean." Acts 10:28. God chose an unusual way to deliver His message to Peter, a message that indeed has been misunderstood by some. What did the Bible say? "None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand."

The philosophers of the East were "wise" in that they acted upon the prophetic information given them, though the whole picture was not yet drawn out for them. They knew enough to start. With their convictions and with their gifts, they headed west to find the source of the Star. As they went, greater understanding was given to them. It's important to see that they stepped out in faith, not knowing everything, and then additional information was given them as needed.

This was the same method God used with Abraham, as he was called from his home in the "east," and it is the same with us as we journey through life in search of Him. Don't expect that you'll have all the answers before you begin your journey; Abraham didn't when he left Ur of the Chaldees. "He went out, not knowing where he was going." Hebrews 11:8. The wise men didn't know where they would end up as they left the "east." Further instruction was forthcoming. But here's the point: if you wait for all the information to be given to you before you ever begin, you may be left forever at the starting blocks. "The path of the just is like the shining sun ("light," KJV), that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18.

The wise men didn't know everything about their quest, but they knew enough to begin. When they came closer, more light was given them. The priests in Jerusalem, though not looking for the coming of the Messiah, nevertheless shared important information with the traveling wise men. The magi arrived in Jerusalem, and when Herod inquired as to the location of this potential rival King, he learned from the religious leaders, the Jewish priests and rabbis, the prophecy of where the Christ would be born. "They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Matthew 2:5, 6.

We see in this passage the truth that information without the Spirit's moving upon the heart is worthless. The scholarly Jews of Jesus' day could quote for you as many of the prophecies as you'd wish, but without a new heart, which only God can give, this information was wasted on them. Jerusalem's teachers knew that the birthplace of the Messiah was Bethlehem; but they had no deep conviction of its significance. They were not looking for Him. Their eyes were focused downward, on the things of this earth, while the wise men were looking above and obtaining the knowledge that Heaven is ready to give all who seek Him.

So, there is "wisdom from above" available to those who earnestly seek it. This wisdom may appear incomplete and subject to interpretation, but if accompanied by the Spirit's promptings, must be acted upon. We see how this principle was applied for the disciples of Christ in the latter part of the first century. At the close of His ministry, Jesus gave valuable counsel to His followers regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who were seeking the heavenly wisdom and earnestly desiring to follow Him understood and obeyed. Here is the counsel He gave. Jesus said through Matthew, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Matthew 24:15, 16. If you lived back then and heard these words, what would you have understood this to mean and how would you have reacted to it?

The devout Christians found this prophecy to be fulfilled when the Roman armies under General Cestius, bent on desolation and destruction came against Jerusalem. They were bearing their idolatrous and blasphemous banners (the "abomination"), entered the sacred precincts which extended outside the city walls of Jerusalem some distance. When they saw these things, remembering the words of the prophet Daniel and the words of Jesus, they said, "The prophecy is being fulfilled. We see the 'abomination of desolation' before our very eyes. The signs and insignia on the flags are an abomination, giving credit to useless and lifeless idols, and this even in the sacred territory dedicated to God, the true Life-giver. They are standing in the holy place. They are here to destroy and desolate. Their flags and banners are an abomination. This is the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by the prophet Daniel. We must be prepared to act on this prophecy and flee as Jesus said." They were shaped by prophecy. They left Jerusalem and were saved. But many others said, "What are you talking about? In what way do you see that Daniel's prophecy is being fulfilled by the armies of Rome?" They remained and were killed.

Luke, writing for the benefit of a Gentile audience, states Jesus' advice this way. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains." Luke 21:20, 21.

The point is that God's messages are often given in code (the symbols and signs of prophecy) and in format in which not all the information is given at once. It is given, one might say, with a risk that it could be misinterpreted by the casual seeker. Those who are sincere in their quest for truth, the "wise" will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, come to an understanding of what God is saying and act upon that information. Thus Christians left Jerusalem when the sign was fulfilled and their lives were saved. Thus Peter left Joppa gave his witness to Cornelius and his household. Thus the wise men left the east and journeyed toward the light, basing their convictions on the prophecy of Balaam, "A star shall come out of Jacob."

Being shaped by God's message, His prophecies, produced action. The day is going to come very soon when all the remaining prophecies of Revelation will be fulfilled. As impossible as it might seem now, our wonderful country will some day turn its back on the principles of freedom and, under the inspiration of Satan and the combined forces of the papacy and fallen Protestantism, bring forth laws that restrict the conscience. A law will be crafted uplifting Sunday as the universal day of worship, in compliance with the will of the man of sin, the beast of prophecy.

When that happens, will you say, "The prophecies of Daniel and of Jesus are now fulfilled. The 'abomination of desolation' is here. It is an abomination that man would attempt to take the place of God and change His holy commandments, that man is invading sacred ground, 'standing in the holy place' of territory that belongs only to the Divine Lawgiver. They are bent on desolation in making laws that restrict conscience and enforcing penalties for the violations thereof." Will you see the prophecy fulfilled when it happens, and will you act when the time comes? Will you be shaped by prophecy?

Today many in Protestantism are foggy on the meaning of the prophetic symbols given in Daniel and Revelation that identify the actors in this play. This, despite the forefathers of Protestantism being so clear in their understanding of these prophecies that they willingly forfeited their lives for truth.

It is tragic that there are sincere worshipers in the Catholic communion who as yet don't know that the system to which they give their allegiance has made a studied effort through the centuries to destroy the Scriptures, to suppress Bible truth and God's commandments. It is sad that there are sincere worshipers within the realms of Protestantism who as yet don't see that they are giving homage to the papacy by continuing to worship on a day that has no Scriptural sanction; that they continue to hold to teachings such as the immortality of the soul, which are not taught by the Bible. It is disappointing to see the shift in prophetic interpretation by the Protestant world today, abandoning the sure foundation upon which the movement began for the heresies of Jesuitism.

It is most disconcerting to note that there are some among Seventh-day Adventists who are hazy and misty on the symbols and teachings of Scripture that forged our Church. If you don't know

who the “beast” is, how could you know what the “mark of the beast” is? How could you call yourself a seventh-day Adventist and not believe in the Sanctuary truth and not know that we are now living in the solemn hour of the Day of Atonement, the time of the Investigative Judgment? How could you call yourself a seventh-day Adventist and not know the message of the Three Angels of Revelation 14 and of the symbols of prophecy?

What will be the result if one is uncertain as to these things when the prophecies reach their complete fulfillment? When a national Sunday law is passed by our congress, will you be prepared to act, even if it means leaving as did the Christians before the destruction of Jerusalem?

With only the benefit of two prophecies, those of Balaam and Daniel, and these being arguably sketchy and subject to interpretation, the wise men from the east put their convictions into action and journeyed. But they had the Benefit of God’s Holy Spirit guiding them and giving further revelation as they moved forward. The time is coming soon when we will have to put our convictions into action. It will be under much more stress than what was experienced by the wise men, or even the Christians who left Jerusalem. The temptation will be great to hit the “snooze alarm” and pass off the conviction and the sign as being too vague to believe. There will be those who will not move forward until all questions are answered; all mysteries explained. These will be left outside the circle of safety, even as those who lived in Noah’s day believed the scientists who argued that a flood was impossible, since it had never before even rained.

Are we willing to be molded by prophecy? Are we willing to be shaped by God’s Word?

The Lord used this illustration when speaking through His messenger Hosea. “Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets.” Hosea 6:5. The word “hew” is a rather abrasive term, being translated in the Bible as “dig, hew, cut and graven.” A noun form of this word used in King David’s time is “mason.” This describes a radical shaping and cutting process. Today this work would be done by a diamond or carborundum blade on a skill saw, possibly a hammer and chisel or hatchet. It’s rough and painful work, but necessary for the product to be fitted for its proper place. Are we willing to be shaped by prophecy? When it’s time to get up and move, will we find an excuse or take action?