

The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel:

Prophetic Connections Across Time

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ABSTRACT

The Magi's journey to worship the Christ child, as recorded in Matthew 2:1–12, is a narrative rooted in profound historical and prophetic connections. This paper explores the origins and roles of the Magi in the Babylonian and Persian empires, tracing their links to the biblical figures of Daniel and Jeremiah. By examining the cultural significance of the Magi, Daniel's influence over them during his captivity, and Jeremiah's prophetic writings, this study reveals how God's sovereign plan integrates historical events, prophecy, and even celestial phenomena. These connections provide a richer understanding of the Magi's role in fulfilling Old Testament expectations and underscore the universal scope of Christ's mission.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Magi's appearance in the New Testament is one of the most enigmatic yet profound elements of the Nativity story. Their recognition of Jesus as the "*King of the Jews*" and their journey to worship Him serve as a vivid example of Gentiles acknowledging the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, their presence is far more than a narrative flourish—it is the culmination of historical, prophetic, and theological threads woven through centuries.

This paper investigates the historical and theological origins of the Magi, focusing on their connection to the biblical figures of Daniel and Jeremiah. It begins by tracing the Magi's cultural and religious significance in the Babylonian and Persian empires, then explores how Daniel's leadership among the Magi shaped their messianic expectations. Additionally, it considers Jeremiah's role in influencing Jewish theology during the Babylonian exile and the likelihood that Daniel was directly aware of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. Finally, the study examines the Magi's journey in Matthew's Gospel in light of these historical and prophetic foundations, showing how their recognition of Christ was part of God's divine plan for the nations.

We honor their faithfulness and recognition of Christ's kingship with the celebration of Epiphany, a holiday that commemorates their journey and worship of the Messiah. For a companion paper, see my study *The Lost Holiday in the West: Epiphany*.¹

¹ D. Gene Williams Jr., *The Lost Holiday in the West: Epiphany, December 25th, and the Twelve Days of Christmas*, accessed January 2025, <https://trinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

II. THE MAGI IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Origins of the Magi

The term “*Magi*” originates from the Old Persian *maguš*, which referred to a priestly caste among the Medes, noted for their expertise in religious rituals, astronomy, and divination. In the Aramaic of Daniel, the term *מַגֵּן* (*magīn*) is used to describe this group, emphasizing their role as wise men or magicians.² By the 6th century BC, the Magi had been integrated into Babylonian and later Persian society, where they gained influence as advisors to kings and interpreters of celestial phenomena.³

Greek sources, such as Herodotus, highlight the Magi’s prominence within Median and Persian traditions. Herodotus identifies the Magi as a hereditary priestly class responsible for maintaining sacred knowledge and performing rituals.⁴ This cultural background established the Magi as a bridge between religion and governance in the ancient Near East.

The Role of the Magi in the Babylonian Empire

Under the Babylonian Empire, the Magi expanded their influence as intellectual elites, skilled in astrology, divination, and dream interpretation. Their ability to read celestial patterns and provide spiritual counsel made them indispensable to the courts of rulers like Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian fascination with celestial phenomena,

² Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 243

³ Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.101.

⁴ Ibid.

including the movement of stars and planets, was closely tied to their religious worldview, positioning the Magi as intermediaries between the divine and earthly realms.⁵

This intellectual tradition had a profound impact on the broader ancient world. Babylonian advancements in astronomy and mathematics were transmitted through the Magi, influencing cultures as far as Greece and India. Their reputation for wisdom and their association with cosmic events set the stage for their role in the Nativity narrative, where their observation of a celestial phenomenon led them to Bethlehem.⁶

III. DANIEL'S INFLUENCE ON THE MAGI

Daniel's Appointment Over the Magi

During the Babylonian captivity, Daniel was elevated to the position of “*chief of the wise men*” (רַב חַכְמֵי, *rav ḥakkimē*), as recorded in Daniel 2:48. This promotion followed his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which no other Magi could decipher.⁷

- “*Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.*” (Daniel 2:48, ESV)⁸

⁵ Richard J. Clifford, *Cosmogonies in the Ancient Near East* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 65.

⁶ Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 57.

⁷ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 85.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:1.

Daniel's appointment placed him in a position to influence the Magi directly, likely introducing them to the prophecies and teachings of Yahweh. His consistent demonstration of God's power, from interpreting dreams to surviving the lion's den, would have left a lasting impression on the Magi and their successors.⁹

Prophetic Contributions

One of Daniel's most significant contributions to the Magi's understanding of the Messiah was his prophecy of the "*seventy weeks*" (Daniel 9:24–27). This prophecy provided a timeline for the coming of an "*Anointed One*," whose arrival would inaugurate a new era of redemption:

- "*Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.*" (Daniel 9:24, ESV)¹⁰

The clarity and specificity of this prophecy would have shaped the Magi's expectations of a coming King. Combined with Daniel's teachings about the God of Israel, it is reasonable to conclude that the Magi retained this knowledge, passing it down through generations until it led them to recognize the star of Bethlehem.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰ J. Paul Tanner, "*Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166, no. 662 (April–June 2009): 181–200

¹¹ Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet*, 112.

IV. JEREMIAH'S ROLE AND CONNECTION TO DANIEL

Jeremiah's Ministry in Judah

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry, which began during the reign of King Josiah (c. 627 BC), focused on warning Judah of impending judgment due to their unfaithfulness to God. Jeremiah prophesied the Babylonian captivity, urging submission to Nebuchadnezzar as God's appointed instrument of judgment:

- *"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years."* (Jeremiah 25:11, ESV)¹²

Despite opposition from Judah's leaders, Jeremiah counseled the people to accept exile as a temporary discipline from God, promising restoration after seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10). This dual message of judgment and hope formed the backbone of Jeremiah's ministry and would later resonate with exiles like Daniel.¹³

Possible Interactions with Daniel

1. Daniel's Possible Exposure to Jeremiah in Jerusalem:

- As a young nobleman in Jerusalem before the first Babylonian deportation in 605 BC, Daniel may have been familiar with Jeremiah's public preaching. Jeremiah's warnings of exile and restoration were well-known in Jerusalem, particularly among the city's elite.¹⁴ If Daniel heard

¹² Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 215.

¹³ J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 445.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 312.

Jeremiah's messages, it would explain his later reliance on Jeremiah's writings.

2. **Jeremiah's Writings in Babylon:**

- In Daniel 9:2, Daniel refers explicitly to Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of exile:
 - i. *"In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."* (ESV)¹⁵
- This indicates that Jeremiah's writings were preserved and studied in Babylon, likely carried there by the exiles. Jeremiah's theology of God's sovereignty over nations and His promise of restoration profoundly shaped Daniel's worldview and prayer life (Daniel 9:3–19).¹⁶

Jeremiah in Egypt

Jeremiah's ministry continued after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Against his counsel, a group of Judeans fled to Egypt, forcibly taking Jeremiah with them (Jeremiah 43:2–7). While in Egypt, Jeremiah warned the exiles of further judgment if they continued to reject God's covenant:

¹⁵ Daniel 9:2.

¹⁶ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 447.

- *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the disaster that I brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah... yet to this day you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 44:2–4, ESV)¹⁷

Unlike Daniel, who achieved prominence in the Babylonian court, Jeremiah remained a prophet to his own people, addressing their persistent rebellion even in exile. The contrast between Jeremiah’s isolation in Egypt and Daniel’s influence in Babylon highlights the diversity of God’s instruments in different contexts.¹⁸

V. THE MAGI IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Journey of the Magi

The Magi’s journey, as recorded in Matthew 2:1–12, represents the fulfillment of their long-standing traditions and prophetic expectations:

- *“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 has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”* (Matthew 2:1–2, ESV)¹⁹

The Magi’s observation of the star of Bethlehem aligns with their expertise in astronomy, a tradition rooted in their Babylonian heritage. Their decision to seek the

¹⁷ Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 345.

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, 327.

¹⁹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 65.

“*King of the Jews*” suggests familiarity with messianic prophecies, likely influenced by Daniel’s teachings about a coming ruler.²⁰

Theological Implications

1. The Magi as Gentile Witnesses:

- The Magi’s journey symbolizes the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s redemptive plan. Their worship of Jesus fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy:
 - i. “*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*” (Isaiah 60:3, ESV)²¹
- Their gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—highlight Christ’s kingship, divinity, and sacrificial role.

1. Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy:

- The Magi’s recognition of Christ reflects the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations. Their journey of hope is expressed in Psalm 72:10–11:
 - i. “*May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!*” (ESV)²²
- The Magi’s worship confirms Jesus as the long-awaited King, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed (Genesis 12:3)²³

²⁰ Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 97.

²¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 152.

²² *Ibid.*, 154.

²³ John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 212.

VI. TYPOLOGICAL AND ASTRONOMICAL REFLECTIONS

The Qumran Calendar and Messianic Expectations

1. **The Significance of the Qumran Calendar:** The Qumran community, known for their preservation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, used a solar-based calendar distinct from the lunar calendar of mainstream Judaism. This calendar not only guided their religious observances but also shaped their eschatological expectations, aligning key dates with messianic prophecies. Michael Heiser argues that the Qumran calendar uniquely creates a time window for the Messiah's arrival that matches Jesus' birth and ministry.²⁴
 - This alignment is particularly significant in light of Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks (Daniel 9:24–27), which provides a timeline for the Messiah's appearance. The Qumran sect likely interpreted these prophecies in their anticipation of an Anointed One who would bring restoration to Israel.²⁵
2. **Connections Between Daniel's Prophecies and Qumran Eschatology:**
 - The Qumran community emphasized themes of divine judgment and restoration, echoing the visions of Daniel. Their writings, such as the War

²⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *What Do the Magi and the Dead Sea Scrolls Have in Common?*, transcript, accessed January 2025, <https://youtu.be/52hVgs5ykFc>.

²⁵ J. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 174–76. Michael S. Heiser, *What Do the Magi and the Dead Sea Scrolls Have in Common?*, transcript, accessed January 2025, <https://youtu.be/52hVgs5ykFc>.

Scroll, reveal an expectation of a cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness, culminating in the establishment of God’s kingdom.²⁶

- Daniel’s prophecies of a coming “*Prince*” and an eternal kingdom (Daniel 7:13–14) likely influenced the Qumran sect’s hope for a divinely appointed Messiah. This eschatological framework connects directly to the Magi’s search for the “*King of the Jews*”.²⁷

Astronomical Signs and Revelation 12

1. The Celestial Alignment on September 11, 3 BC:

- Revelation 12:1 describes a celestial scene involving a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars. Astronomical programs identify this alignment with the constellation Virgo on September 11, 3 BC, over Jerusalem. This date coincides with **Rosh Hashanah** (Tishri 1), the Jewish New Year and the day marking the reign of Davidic kings.²⁸
- The alignment includes Jupiter (the “*king planet*”) and Regulus (the “*king star*”) in the constellation Leo (the Lion), representing the tribe of Judah. Together, these celestial events highlight Jesus’ royal lineage and kingship.²⁹

²⁶ James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 92–95.

²⁷ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 202.

²⁸ Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 120–22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125–27.

2. **The Magi's Interpretation of the Signs:**

- The Magi, as experts in astronomy and astrology, would have recognized the significance of this alignment. Their Babylonian training and the influence of Daniel's teachings likely informed their understanding of such celestial phenomena.³⁰
- Observing the star of Bethlehem, the Magi interpreted it as a sign of the birth of a world-changing King, aligning with both their traditions and the messianic prophecies preserved through Daniel.³¹

VII. CONCLUSION

1. **Recap of Historical and Theological Connections:** This study has explored the historical and theological connections between the Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel, demonstrating how their narratives converge to highlight God's sovereignty. The Magi's journey to worship Christ was not an isolated event but the culmination of centuries of prophecy, cultural exchange, and divine orchestration.
2. **Reflection on God's Sovereignty:**
 - The integration of historical events, prophetic visions, and celestial phenomena reveals the meticulous nature of God's plan for redemption. From Daniel's influence on the Magi to Jeremiah's writings on restoration and the astronomical signs of Christ's birth, every element points to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.

³⁰ Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.101.

³¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 71–74.

3. **Encouragement for Further Study:**

- The connections between biblical prophecy and historical events invite deeper exploration. Understanding how God orchestrates history to fulfill His purposes enriches faith and demonstrates the timeless relevance of Scripture.

APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY INSIGHTS ON THE MAGI, PROPHECY, AND ASTRONOMY

1. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel

Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (Daniel 9:24–27) is a foundational text in messianic eschatology. Below is an outline of its key elements:

- **Context:** Daniel's prayer for Israel's restoration (Daniel 9:3–19) prompted Gabriel's revelation of the seventy weeks.
- **Key Timeline:**
 - The "seventy weeks" symbolize seventy sets of seven years (490 years).
 - The countdown begins with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).
 - The final week culminates with the Messiah being "cut off" and the eventual restoration of God's people.
- **Messianic Implications:**
 - The prophecy aligns with the arrival of Jesus as the "Anointed One" and His sacrificial death.

2. The Qumran Calendar and Its Significance

- The Qumran sect used a solar calendar with 364 days, ensuring consistent alignment of sacred festivals.³²
- **Messianic Alignment:**
 - The Qumran calendar correlates with Daniel's prophetic timeline, offering a precise window for the Messiah's arrival.
 - Scholars, such as Michael Heiser, suggest that this alignment uniquely matches the life and ministry of Jesus.³³

3. Astronomical Details and Revelation 12

- **Celestial Alignment on September 11, 3 BC:**

³² J. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 174–76.

³³ Michael S. Heiser, *What Do the Magi and the Dead Sea Scrolls Have in Common?*, transcript, accessed January 2025, <https://youtu.be/52hVgs5ykFc>.

- The constellation Virgo was "clothed with the sun," with the moon under her feet and Jupiter and Regulus aligning in Leo (Revelation 12:1–2).
- **Significance:**
 - Virgo represents the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14).
 - Leo, the Lion of Judah, underscores Jesus' Davidic lineage.
- **Astrological Interpretation by the Magi:**
 - The Magi, skilled in Babylonian astronomy, viewed these signs as signaling the birth of a divine king.
 - Their traditions, influenced by Daniel, shaped their understanding of the celestial events.³⁴

4. The Cultural Role of the Magi

- **Historical Evolution:**
 - Initially a Median priestly caste, the Magi integrated into Babylonian and Persian courts as advisors in astrology, medicine, and governance.
 - Greek and Roman sources portray them as exotic sages, enhancing their mystique by the time of Christ.³⁵
- **Connection to Daniel:**
 - As "chief of the wise men" (Daniel 2:48), Daniel likely introduced the Magi to Jewish eschatology, contributing to their later recognition of Jesus.

³⁴ Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 112–15.

³⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.101.

APPENDIX B: TABLES AND DIAGRAMS

Timeline of the Seventy Weeks		
Event	Biblical Reference	Approximate Year
Decree to rebuild Jerusalem	Ezra 1:1–4	457 BC
Arrival of the Messiah	Daniel 9:25	27 AD
Messiah “cut off”	Daniel 9:26	30 AD
Celestial Alignments		
Date	Constellation Alignment	Biblical Connection
September 11, 3 BC	Virgo, Jupiter, Regulus	Revelation 12:1; Matthew 2:2

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