

Feature Article: JAS001

## THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM: LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

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This article first appeared in the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 30, number 6 (2007). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

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### SYNOPSIS

Matthew, in his gospel account of the life of Christ, recorded the appearance of a star that guided magi to Bethlehem so that they might pay tribute to the newborn King of the Jews. Through the years there have been many hypothetical explanations, whether natural, astronomical, or astrological, of the nature and behavior of this so-called star of Bethlehem. The appearance could have been a new bright star or comet or the movements of the planets relative to each other, the sun, and the moon. Perhaps what the magi saw was a nova or supernova bright enough to qualify as a real star (as we know them today) with astronomical and historical significance. A comet might have moved, over a few months' time, from one constellation to another, more southerly, constellation. It is possible that major planets could have come into close proximity with each other, appearing as one, which would have created significant interest in professional observers of the night sky. Any one of these natural occurrences would have been noteworthy, and God certainly could have used them in His divine plan to announce to the world the birth of His Son and to guide a select group of astronomers to be His first worshipers. It is possible, however, to follow Matthew's account of the star from a more supernatural viewpoint, consistent with the biblical record and with the supernatural character of the event to which the star pointed and in doing so realize that the magi were led to Bethlehem, not by light from space, but by light from heaven.

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Matthew's Gospel records certain events that accompanied the birth of Jesus Christ. In his account alone is a record of the appearance of the "star of Bethlehem" and the coming of "wise men" from the east, guided by the star to the newborn King of the Jews.

Wise men, or magi, came to Jerusalem, seeking the King of the Jews. They were "from the east" (Matt. 2:1)<sup>1</sup>—men who lived in a region of the world that was east of Jerusalem; consequently, they traveled westward. The guidance that was given to them took them from their eastern location to a destination west of their point of departure, not just in a general westerly direction, but to a specific location, the city of Jerusalem.

Any hypothesis of the star of Bethlehem must be able to explain how these men could be guided on a westward journey and how that guidance could be maintained over a fairly long period of time. Some who adhere to a supernatural explanation, as we shall see, place the guiding star in the west, stationary over Jerusalem, leading the magi in their journey. From this perspective, the magi, while *in the east*, saw the star *in the west* and followed it. In my view, not only were the magi guided westward by the star, they received their guidance while the star remained "in the east" (Matt. 2:2). That is, the star, while *in the east*, guided them toward a destination *in the west*. Both views, of course, agree on this: the event was a supernatural one.

Some have tried to harmonize Matthew's account with naturally occurring astronomical phenomena by limiting the magi's observation of the star "in the east" to occurring only at its rising and not continually.

Michael Molnar has speculated that “in the east” could be an astronomical term meaning “at the *heliacal* rising” or “at the morning appearance”<sup>2</sup> of a planet. Matthew, however, is not an astronomer who is using technical language: he is a tax collector turned disciple and gospel writer who is using a simple term that is familiar to his readers to refer to where the magi were from and where the star was.

The wise men arrived in Jerusalem. My assumption, consistent with Matthew’s record of a later reappearance (Matt. 2:9),<sup>3</sup> is that the star disappeared.

Herod secretly questioned the magi as to “the time the star appeared” (Matt. 2:7). Herod (and others in Jerusalem) had not seen the star at all and had to ask the magi when *they* had seen the star, not because he (and his advisers) simply had missed some natural yet rare astronomical phenomenon (or at least missed its importance), but because he could not see the “star,” nor could anyone else except the magi. Herod had an evil motive (see Matt. 2:12–18) and told the magi that they should go to Bethlehem to find the object of their search. The end of their journey was near—only a few miles to the south, but they needed more specific guidance, not just to a town, but to the house where the King of the Jews awaited them.

The magi started on the last leg of their journey, heading southward toward Bethlehem; “and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east went on before them, until it came and stood over where the child was” (Matt. 2:9). Matthew records a sense of astonishment (“lo!” or “behold!”) when they saw the star again, the *same star* they had seen before “in the east.”<sup>4</sup>

The star not only had disappeared and then reappeared, it had also moved to a stationary place over a specific house in Bethlehem. If previous behaviors of the star are difficult to harmonize with natural astronomical phenomena, this one surely challenges all attempts at such an explanation. This was truly a unique and miraculous occurrence; it was “His star” (Matt. 2:2) and its purpose was to bring wise men from the east westward to Jerusalem and southward to a house in Bethlehem, “where the Child was” (Matt. 2:9), and where they would fall down and worship Him (Matt. 2:11).

#### WHAT ASTRONOMY HAS TO SAY

Ernest L. Martin believed that “the star of Bethlehem can be explained in a thoroughly natural way.”<sup>5</sup> Others have thought so, too. Johannes Kepler, a seventeenth-century astronomer, believed that the star could have been a supernova. A *nova* (Latin for “new”) is a star that has suddenly increased in brightness and therefore appears to be a new star in the night sky. It is, however, not a new star at all, but a long-lived star that is in the process of changing and maybe even dying; it is new only to earthly observers. The word *supernova* describes a star that grows in visibility to a much greater degree (and for different reasons). Both supernovas and novas will, of course, remain in their fixed positions on the celestial sphere and, thereby, rotate daily from east to west with the rest of the stars.

Others have proposed a more transient phenomenon: a comet. A comet is a “dirty snowball” orbiting the sun, usually in a highly elliptical orbit. As it nears the sun, solar radiation vaporizes gases and particles of dirt from the comet. These flow away from the comet nucleus, forming a head, or *coma*, and a tail that grows in length and brightness as the comet approaches the sun and then decreases as it recedes.

Colin Humphreys has argued that the star of Bethlehem was a comet that “was visible in 5 BC, and described in ancient Chinese records.”<sup>6</sup> His explanation involves the occurrence of conjunctions. A conjunction of planets occurs when two or more planets, in their individual paths across earth’s sky, come into close proximity, sometimes (though very rarely) close enough that they almost seem to merge into a single bright object. His argument depends on several factors: (1) the magi’s ability to decipher the theological significance of repeated conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC, a conjunction of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in Pisces in 6 BC, and, finally, the appearance of a comet in the constellation Capricornus in 5 BC; (2) their association of the constellation Pisces with Israel; and (3) their grasp of the supposed allusion of the prophet Daniel to the constellations Capricornus and Aries (Dan. 8:5–21).

“Thoroughly natural” explanations like those of Martin, Molnar, and Humphreys often involve complicated movements of planets that may involve a conjunction of planets or the movement of a planet behind the sun or the moon (an occultation). Roger Sinnott described a close conjunction of Venus and

Jupiter that occurred on the evening of June 17, 2 BC, in the constellation of Leo the Lion.<sup>7</sup> Martin and Craig Chester have endorsed and expanded on this “great celestial dance,” correlating other lesser conjunctions, eclipses, full moons, and planetary retrograde loops with historical events.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Molnar believes that “the answers to our questions about the Star of Bethlehem lie in the philosophical and religious practices of the people who interpreted celestial events as portents.”<sup>9</sup> The conclusion from his extensive research is that April 17, 6 BC was the date of the birth of Christ. He writes, “Any horoscope drawn for April 17, 6 BC, [must have been] regal because the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter, and Saturn are in the sign of Aries, conditions which perfectly and simultaneously fulfill the major regal principles [of Greek astrology]! And amazingly, Jupiter, the Magi’s star, was heliacally rising in the east and in a close conjunction (occultation) with the Moon, which gave even more regal significance to that day.”<sup>10</sup>

### WHAT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARIES HAVE TO SAY

Christian commentators generally come to one of three conclusions regarding the star of Bethlehem: (1) a few ignore the question of the nature and behavior of the star altogether ; (2) some accept a naturalistic explanation; and (3) some say the explanation is supernatural and miraculous but leave it at that.

The handful of commentators who make no attempt whatsoever to explain the star or to offer an opinion about it believe that it is unnecessary to identify the actual star, confess a lack of interest in the question, or declare their belief that it does not matter. Choosing not to dwell on these questions, Charles Spurgeon, for example, declared that they “are not of much importance to us.”<sup>11</sup>

Some commentators, while accepting all the other miraculous aspects of the birth of Christ, prefer a more natural and “scientific” explanation of the star, such as: “The testimony of the Scriptures...is supported by the testimony of nature.”<sup>12</sup> Origen (third century AD) considered the star “to have been a new star, unlike any of the other well-known planetary bodies, either those in the firmament above or those among the lower orbs, but partaking of the nature of those celestial bodies which appear at times, such as comets, or...meteors.”<sup>13</sup> Spurgeon pronounced the star “an unusual luminary”<sup>14</sup> and offered the explanation that it “was probably a meteor, or moving light, which having shone long enough in the western heavens to guide them to Judea, then ceased to be visible; but shone forth again as they quitted Jerusalem.”<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Addison Alexander wrote of the planetary conjunction hypothesis, “This astronomical solution is...from its scientific character and from the high authority on which it rests, more satisfactory than the assumption of a transient meteor, a comet, or a purely miraculous appearance, which would here be less impressive than a natural phenomenon, coincident with such a juncture in the moral world, and showing both to be under the same infinitely powerful and wise control.”<sup>16</sup>

Donald Hagner agreed that the star “may well be...a ‘natural’ astronomical phenomenon”;<sup>17</sup> however, what he accepted as a natural occurrence at the beginning of the story (the appearance of the star) became for him only “myth” later (the reappearance of the star): “This verse [Matt. 2:9] makes difficult the explanation of the star as a strictly ‘natural’ astronomical phenomenon...If the ‘natural’ explanation of the star is accepted nevertheless, then the present verse...must be understood either as a touch of romantic myth growing out of the historical kernel or else as referring to something actually experienced by the magi and interpreted in terms of the leitmotif of the star that first ‘led’ them from the east to Jerusalem.”<sup>18</sup>

A few other writers incorporate elements of both the natural and the miraculous in their comments, but in the end offer no real explanation: “a remarkable astrological phenomenon”;<sup>19</sup> “this unusual stellar manifestation”;<sup>20</sup> “a new phenomenon in the sky”;<sup>21</sup> “I am inclined to think that Matthew is depicting a *miraculous* star, a ‘Wunderstern,’ that took on a natural star’s form.”<sup>22</sup> The opinion of Ignatius (second century AD) was that “a star shone forth in heaven above all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light was exceedingly great above them all. And there was agitation felt as to whence this new spectacle came, so unlike everything else [in the heavens].”<sup>23</sup> Calvin believed that “it was not a natural star, but extra-ordinary, for it was not of the order of nature...None of

this accords with natural stars. It is more probable that it was like a comet, seen in the atmosphere rather than in the heaven."<sup>24</sup>

Most Christian commentators clearly support a supernatural approach, and most of those writers are content to declare the event "miraculous" without further comment: "it was a miracle";<sup>25</sup> "a special sign, a miraculous star";<sup>26</sup> "an unusual star...supernatural rather than natural";<sup>27</sup> "a miracle...a special light in the sky";<sup>28</sup> "the strange star...a supernatural phenomena [*sic*]."<sup>29</sup>

Charles Eerdman declared the star to be "some sign in the heaven...It seems probable that the guidance was supernatural. Something like a star in appearance, but near the earth, may have been granted to lead those travelers to their sacred goal."<sup>30</sup> R. C. H. Lenski wrote, "It ought to be plain that this was not a star such as others that our astronomers observe and study...what these magi saw was a startling phenomenon...a miraculous phenomenon."<sup>31</sup> Reflecting on Matthew 2:9 and the reappearance of the star, Craig Blomberg concluded, "But regardless of how much the star had traveled, its motion here seems to require a supernatural event. Various attempts to link the star with different astronomical phenomena, especially for purposes of dating...prove interesting but are probably irrelevant."<sup>32</sup>

The opinion of John Broadus was this: "Taking Matthew's language according to its obvious import, we have to set aside the above [natural] explanations, and to regard the appearance as miraculous; conjecture as to its nature will then be to no profit. The supernatural is easily admitted here, since there were so many miracles connected with the Savior's birth."<sup>33</sup>

David Hill and Ed Glasscock cautioned their readers against any attempt at all at natural explanation. Hill declared, "The patently miraculous character of the star in the narrative makes it gratuitous to seek a material explanation of it from astronomical science."<sup>34</sup> Glasscock stated, "Attempts to associate this star with certain conjunctions of the planets or other natural astronomical phenomena are unnecessary and unprofitable. There is no need to try to justify Matthew's account with human reasoning because none of the explanations could offer more credibility to the account... In reality, any attempt to explain the event by natural phenomena becomes derogatory rather than honoring to God."<sup>35</sup>

Spurgeon came closest to a supernatural explanation based on additional biblical evidence: "It must have been a star occupying quite another sphere from that in which the planets revolve. We believe it to have been a luminous appearance in mid-air; probably akin to that which led the children of Israel through the wilderness, which was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night."<sup>36</sup> John MacArthur and James Montgomery Boice agreed. The star was "surely the glory of God, blazing as if it were an extremely bright star—visible only to the eyes for whom it was intended to be seen,"<sup>37</sup> "a miraculous phenomenon, possibly an appearance of the Shekinah glory."<sup>38</sup>

### WHAT THE BIBLE SUGGESTS: LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

Let me now offer a different hypothesis of the star as a supernatural event. I propose that it was a source of light in the sky (as are naturally occurring astronomical objects), but that this was a different kind of source, emitting a different kind of light.

My fundamental premise is this: the star was an opening in the supernatural, other-dimensional boundary that separates heaven and earth; it was a tear in the fabric of heaven. God made an opening so that the light of heaven shone on the earth. This was, I believe, the star of Bethlehem, and it was a heavenly light that guided the magi.

This proposal of an opening of heaven is consistent with other biblical accounts. When Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21). When Saul met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3). On special occasions, then, God has opened heaven and sent light from heaven to earth.

This special opening in the earth/heaven boundary would have appeared in the sky either to the west or to the east of the initial location of the magi. Since this source of light was not connected in any natural way to the celestial sphere (along with the sun, moon, stars, planets, and comets), it could remain stationary with respect to the earth. All the naturally occurring astronomical objects rise in the east and

set in the west from day to day, and they drift on the celestial sphere over longer periods of time. The star of Bethlehem, however, stayed just above the western horizon, beckoning the magi to Jerusalem, or behind them, on the eastern horizon, throughout their journey. In either case, they saw this star in a fixed location in the sky: there it appeared and there it stood.

This opening in heaven (God's abode) would not have been visible to other earthly observers (Herod had not seen it). The opening would have been near the wise men,<sup>39</sup> low in the sky, emitting the light from heaven, not in all directions as a natural star does, but in a well-defined, narrow beam, much like today's lasers.

Exactly how this light provided guidance depends on where one locates the star and the magi. Some place the magi in the east and the star in the west.<sup>40</sup> "The magi, and not the star, were in the east and followed the star in the western sky."<sup>41</sup> In this view, the heavenly opening is in front of the wise men. They observe this unusual phenomenon,<sup>42</sup> that is, light from a "star" that remains stationary in the west, and follow it to Jerusalem, much as they followed this same "star" as it "went on before them" to Bethlehem in the south.

Some place the magi in the east and the star in the east ("We have seen His star in the east").<sup>43</sup> If this was the case, then the light from heaven, shining from behind the magi, would have served as a source of illumination on their path westward.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, this opening in heaven's fabric is in a fixed location in the eastern sky, and the light is shining on or in front of the magi much as it did on Paul when the light flashed "around him."

Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (Isa. 9:2), as he foresaw the birth of the Prince of Peace (9:6). Matthew saw the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Jesus' coming and preaching in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali (see Isa. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:12-17). Jesus is the Light to the Gentiles; in Him is the prophecy fulfilled. I think Isaiah's words may also invite a literal reading of light shining on some future God-seekers: they lived "in a [spiritually] dark land" and saw "a great [heavenly] light," which shone "on them," and it guided them to the "child [who would] be born." The illumination was sufficient for them to travel at night or during the day,<sup>45</sup> and it brought the wise travelers finally to the western limit of their journey: Jerusalem. At that time, according to this scenario, the opening in heaven was closed; the star disappeared.

God waited as the wise men met with Herod and received further directions to turn southward toward Bethlehem. The directions were accurate and true to Scripture, but God was not going to leave the magi without His supernatural guidance and confirmation. As the wise men turned toward the south to continue their search for the King of the Jews, "Lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them" (Matt. 2:9). The source of heavenly illumination opened to their south, over Bethlehem, and the light from heaven beckoned the magi to their final destination.

The wise men followed the star as it moved before them "until it came and stood over where the Child was" (Matt. 2:9). Whether by positioning the heavenly opening over the house (and in the line of sight of the magi) or by illuminating the house itself with light from heaven, God guided the wise men to their final destination. They did what they came to do and departed. The opening(s) in the heavenly fabric did what it was meant to do, then closed.

### HOW THIS NEW APPROACH HELPS US

The star of Bethlehem was, I believe, a supernatural event, and its nature and behavior can be explained reasonably using a consistently biblical approach. John Chrysostom (fourth century AD) was right:

For if ye can learn what the star was, and of what kind, and whether it were one of the common stars, or new and unlike the rest, and whether it was a star by nature or a star in appearance only, we shall easily know the other things also. Whence then will these points be manifest? From the very things that are written. Thus, that this star was not of the common sort, or rather not a star at all, as it seems at least to me, but some invisible power transformed into this appearance, is in the first place evident from its very course. For there is not, there is not any star that moves by this way...[it was] some power highly endued with reason.<sup>46</sup>

In the end, by adopting this “light-from-heaven” approach, I have not denied the importance and reliability of good science; we have simply said that astronomy (or astrology) is not a necessary factor in the interpretation of Matthew 2:1–11. Of course, I can offer no tangible evidence that this hypothesis is absolutely correct. This was a unique, miraculous event; God employed unique, miraculous means to bring it about; and Scripture is a necessary and sufficient source of understanding of the means. Preachers and teachers of God’s Word can take heart in knowing that they now can offer a biblically based, fully consistent description of the nature and behavior of the star of Bethlehem without feeling inadequate in astronomical matters or, in fact, relying on them at all.

## NOTES

1. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.
2. Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 87. Molnar offers an explanation of the star that integrates ancient coinage, ancient astrological techniques, and modern astronomy, depending mainly on astrology. Magi may have been ancient astronomers who relied on astrology and horoscopes to seek guidance, but God would have had no use for or need of astrology. *These* magi may indeed have been experts in the stars, but they were “wise men” because they followed the supernatural guidance of the *Creator* of the stars.
3. Defenders of a natural approach suggest that the star had simply moved from an easterly location to one further south. The two astronomical phenomena that come closest to this behavior are the movements of a comet, which can place it in different parts of the sky, and the retrograde (backward) motion of a planet against the background of stationary stars, which requires the planet to stop before it begins to move retrograde.
4. Matthew’s use of the word “*lo*” in his record (*idou* in the Greek) is important to my understanding of the nature and behavior of the star. Unfortunately, the New American Standard Updated version omits from v. 9 this expression of astonishment. This amazement is clearly seen in v. 10: “And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”
5. Ernest L. Martin, *New Star over Bethlehem* (Pasadena, CA: FBR Publications, 1980), 1.
6. Colin Humphreys, “The Star of Bethlehem,” *Science and Christian Belief* 5 (October 1995): 83–101.
7. Roger W. Sinnott, “Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem,” *Sky and Telescope* (December 1968): 384–86.
8. Craig Chester, “The Star of Bethlehem,” *Imprimis* 25, 12 (December 1996): 1–6. See also [www.askelm.com](http://www.askelm.com) (Associates for Scriptural Knowledge) for a good discussion of the conjunction hypothesis.
9. Molnar, 32.
10. *Ibid.*, 101.
11. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 1:13.
12. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 233.
13. Origen, *Origen against Celsus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:422.
14. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The King Has Come*, ed. Larry Richards (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1987), 21.
15. *Ibid.*, 23. We may not be exactly sure of Spurgeon’s thinking in suggesting the star of Bethlehem was “probably a meteor”; however, we do know today that meteors are pieces of solid interplanetary material that burn up while passing through the earth’s atmosphere. This “shooting star” or “falling star” leaves a luminous trail across the sky that lasts less than a few seconds, a time far too short to guide men on a journey of hundreds of miles.
16. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 23.
17. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 27.
18. *Ibid.*, 30.
19. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 37.
20. Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), 50.
21. John Phillips, *Matthew* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), 39.
22. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 59.
23. Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, Library of the Christian Church: Ante-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 57.
24. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 83.
25. Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 19.
26. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1980), 18.
27. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 21–23.
28. Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1971), 65.
29. Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, HoINTC (Nashville: Holman, 2000), 20.
30. Charles R. Eerdman, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), 33.
31. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 60.
32. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 65.
33. John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist, 1886), 17.
34. David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 83.
35. Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 51–52.

36. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 1:12.
37. John MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 1–7*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 29.
38. James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 30.
39. Calvin believed that the star was “in the atmosphere rather than in the heaven” (i.e., rather than in outer space, the realm of astronomical phenomena).
40. See, e.g., the *New International Reader’s Version*: “When we were in the east, we saw his star.”
41. Leander E. Keck, Senior New Testament Editor, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VIII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 142.
42. “Matthew is clearly describing a miraculous phenomenon directed behind the scenes by God.” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 142.
43. See, e.g., *The Message*: “We observed a star in the eastern sky.”
44. Bernard Ramm, in fact, used this “over the shoulder” argument, but he used it against the hypothesis that the star was a nova: “The theory that it was *Nova Cassiopeiae* must be rejected, as this is a northern star and the wise men would have traveled to Palestine with the star at their backs!” (Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* [Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1964], 113.)
45. John Chrysostom thought that “it appears not in the night, but in mid-day” (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 10:37).
46. *Ibid.*