

Christmas WiseMenAndTheStar 12-12-14b

We pick up our study now, we're attempting to follow the star that the wise men followed from the east to find the young Lord Jesus. And we have established that there was a frame of reference in the skies. It was well known, had been known for centuries, going back to the days of the Exodus, when the tribes first became entities within the nation in a distinct way.

They had always been sort of a large family, kind of a clan system. But when Jacob becomes a nation, when Israel emerges from the womb of Egypt and is born as a nation, these tribal assignments take on significance. The land is going to be apportioned by tribes, the wilderness wanderings, the camp every night is organized by tribes.

And as I mentioned earlier, we touched on this when we studied the book of Exodus. And you remember that in the camp of Israel, there were banners for each of the tribes and they would march and the tribes would stay together. And then when they would camp, there would be three tribes on each side with the Levites and the tabernacle in the middle.

And if you recall, Judah was the leader tribe and so they were to the east and they had a banner. We only know sort of the guidon tribes for each of these four directions. That's why we know four out of the twelve symbols.

And we can associate the constellations, you can kind of figure out the other tribes that camped with them were probably the constellations to one side or the other of these constellations. But the constellation was memorable as it is today. We talk about Orion the bear or Leo the lion or Scorpio the scorpion or Virgo.

You've got Aquarius and you've got the twins and so on. These are still memory aids today, although far less so. Well, think about that.

There were four principal tribes in Israel, one on each side of the camp. Judah, of course, was to the east. Each of these tribes was associated with a constellation and with the symbol for that constellation.

And this symbol was on their banner as near as we can tell. Again, this isn't strictly in the Bible. It's traditional.

We're getting it as hearsay from the Jews back into the inscrutable past. We believe it to be true. So four of these are known.

Reuben, of course, was the firstborn. And you remember what Jacob told him because of his problems of self-discipline and the reason he lost the privileges of the firstborn. He went up and defiled his father's bed and one thing and another.

And what's the first thing Jacob pronounces to him when he's talking to him on his pronouncing his final blessings and predictions? He goes into prophecy mode. What does he say about

Reuben? You are what? Unstable as water. Well, there is a constellation that is the water bearer and.

This is his mother, when he was born, said, behold, a son, and that's that's what his name means. Reuben is Ra'ah Ben. I see a son.

Here's a son. Look, a son. So it's it's the figure of a man and he's bearing water.

That's Reuben, the firstborn. Secondly, Judah is a lion's whelp. So you've got the constellation of a lion or we call it Leo today.

Jesus is called the lion of the tribe of Judah in Revelation 5.5. Of course, that's the kingly symbol has been for millennia. And the name Judah means to to be praised. This is where the name Jew comes from, from the land of Judah and the Judean and the D eventually dropped out and they were just Jews.

But of course, they were the surviving tribe after the ten northern went out and Benjamin kind of melted away. Dan, the tribe of Dan, was the third notable tribe. Dan, of course, means judge and the symbol of Dan.

Remember, in Genesis 49, all these predictions, by the way, that the statements of Jacob are in Genesis 49. We saw them in our Genesis study. Jacob says Dan shall be a serpent that biteth the horse's heels.

He's the serpent that bites. And the stinging, crawling thing, the serpent or the scorpion, the Scorpio has been associated with both scorpion and serpent going back a long way. So the serpent, of course, was known for his cunning, his wisdom.

And you want a wise judge, but he's also got to be just. And the serpent's wisdom may turn out to be a bad thing instead of a good one. More about the serpent shortly.

Finally, the fourth tribe is Joseph and specifically Ephraim. Remember, he's the double. You get Ephraim and Manasseh and Ephraim was the younger, but he turns out to be the blessed one.

Jacob crosses his hands. And so you have the tribe of Ephraim. And Ephraim was the wild ox.

And Manasseh is sort of the horns on the ox, Ephraim and Manasseh, they go together as the tribe of Joseph, but Ephraim is the bulk and Manasseh is the horns. This is Deuteronomy 33, 17 for that combination. The old King James translated the word ox as unicorn because of this ox and pointy horn idea.

And of course, they find unicorns in your Bible now, but this is a favorite little nugget that the skeptics like to toss out. And oh, your Bible talks about unicorns. Well, the old King James did.

But the word in Hebrew is ox. But this was a wild ox and this might have been a species back then that didn't have horns that stuck out sideways. Maybe they stuck more forward, like your

cartoon bulls in the Bugs Bunny cartoons.

But these four tribes corresponded to the four cardinal directions. So we've got three associations now. We've got the compass directions.

We've got these tribes lining up in accordance with these associated constellations on the ground, linking their star symbol to their physical presence. And we've got the compass directions, Judah is to the east and so on. Now, a further point of interest here is David is the first lion of the tribe of Judah.

He is the king that comes forth from Judah. Saul doesn't count. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin.

That's not even a Joseph tribe, that's number 12. And Judah kind of heads up to number one in prominence. So, you know, the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

It has kind of a reverse fulfillment there. But one of the things that was a signal accomplishment, one of the biggest victories that David achieved in coming to the throne and establishing peace for his son, Solomon. I told you there would be a connection to our Kings and Prophets study.

This is about the only connection I can make. But one of the things that David did is he subdued Moab. That was one of his great battle streamers is he defeated and subjugated Moab that had been a thorn in the side beforehand and would be again afterward.

And so the first true scepter in Israel does smite the brow of Moab on the ground. But what's on the ground is reflected in the sky and what's in the sky is mirrored on the ground, much as there is a heavenly tabernacle and there's an earthly tabernacle. There are these these links.

Now, is there any point of application to that? I would say this. When we think about that, it isn't so much that somebody buys you a star and sends you a little certificate and says, you know, the former, you know, LCDP 4975 is now called. Sam's solar system or something, you know, they do that.

You can buy a star, get it officially registered and you get to name it and everything. That's, of course, not what we're talking about. But keep in mind, there is a strong precedent.

For impressing on us. That reality is in the heavens and it is a pale reflection and shadow here, we tend to think of this as reality and heaven as the ephemeral, ethereal, otherly, maybe someday I'll see it kind of a thing. But over and over again, in so many different ways, the Bible says, look, this is a metaphor down here.

This is just a small sample. This is a taste. This is just an icon for the program.

This isn't the program. This isn't the real deal. I love to go to Costco and or some of these other stores and you want to get a camping tent or you want to get a gazebo.

And so you go and they've got little tiny ones, but the zippers are full size. So you think, well, now, if I get this actual thing, are the zipper tabs going to be as you know, I was going to take two hands to pull that down because they make these little miniatures and everything is miniature, but not the zipper tabs. Zipper tabs are big.

And I thought, you know, kids would want to get really fancy with their dolls and things that would crave. What do they do with these after the special is over? Where do they go? Is there a warehouse for a little miniature? I don't know. But it's just it's just interesting to me.

I get I can hardly walk by without stopping and just looking at the construction of the thing, thinking, look, they made a little miniature tent here. Why? But they did. And it's kind of cool.

Whose job is that? I want that job. I want I want to be the guy that makes these model miniatures. I just think, but that's what this life is.

We're we're just a miniature. We're a sample. This is a foretaste of glory divine, like the song says.

So back to the wise men, back to the star, what's going on here? Well, we're beginning to build kind of a circumstantial case, aren't we? We we know a lot more than we did when they're just these three guys in robes and crowns and a couple of camels shuffling along with the gold, frankincense and myrrh. We've got we've got a context. We've got a background.

We've got some scriptural support for association between the tribes. And these constellations, and that's pretty firm. I'll tell you something else that's firm.

Turn with me to the book of Ezekiel, chapter one. We were in Ezekiel a few years back. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, chapter one, by the way, just so you know that I didn't miss it, there is a reference to smiting the brow of Moab in Jeremiah.

If you want to look that up and figure it out, let me know what it means because I haven't got the foggiest notion. That verse is as inscrutable to me as the inside of a mummy's face plate. I have no knowledge.

I don't know what it means. Something about the town of Sihon and somebody's brow in Moab getting smote. I don't know what it means.

Figure it out. Let me know. I don't think it's pertinent to our study.

I don't think the wise men even knew what that one meant. But here we are in Ezekiel, chapter one. Now, verse four, Ezekiel looks and behold, whirlwind comes out of the north.

They love this whirlwind. Remember Job and the whirlwind? Elihu and then comes the whirlwind. Now, verse five, Ezekiel looks and behold, raging fire engulfing itself.

Brightness was all around it, radiating out of the mist like the color of amber, out of the midst

of the fire, from within it, the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance. They had the likeness of a man.

Each one had four faces and each one had four wings. Their legs are straight. Soles of the feet were like the soles of calves feet, sparkle like the color of burnished bronze, hands under their wings.

Wings touch each other. The face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side. Lion on the right side.

Who's the lion? Judah. If you're looking at the camp from, let's say the south, because you're looking at the sides of the north, where's Judah going to be? On the right. Each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side.

Who's the ox? Ephraim. Where's Ephraim? West side of the camp, if I remember right, if memory serves. Each of the four had the face of an eagle.

Thus were their faces. So there's a face of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle. So what's our match up here with the four principal tribes and the constellations? We've got three out of four, right? Which one doesn't match? The eagle.

What's the corresponding thing? The snake. So let's think about this. What's the difference in an eagle and a snake? Well, let me ask you this.

Do snakes eat eagles or do eagles eat snakes? Which one crawls on his belly and eats dust? And which one mounts up with wings and is as close to God as you can get on this earth? This is pretty much the biggest contrast you can make between animals, isn't it? Which one could have been in the throne room of God and now isn't and got replaced? There's been a swap out. Now, whose symbol is it that got the swap? What tribe? Tribe of Dan? No offense to all of you Dans out there, but what do we know about the tribe of Dan? This is the most problematic tribe in Israel. What happens when you get to the book of Revelation and the 12 tribes are listed out? Who's missing? Who gets replaced? Tribe of Dan.

Everybody says it's a mistake. I don't think so. Now, here's what else is interesting.

The name Dan means what? Judge. When we went through and studied Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 and looked at Lucifer when he was in heaven and he had the starts and the stops. Remember that King James says something about pipes and timbrels.

But this is, he's the access angel. He's the guy that judges whether or not your case is worthy to go into the Supreme Court of Heaven, which is God himself, or whether it's going to be adjudicated outside. And he finally says, you know what? I believe I can do all this judging myself.

I will be like the most high. I will put my throne above the stars of God, the stars of God, the five

I wills. So he starts out being the judge.

He starts out being Dan and he ends up being the serpent. He ought to be the eagle and he's the snake or the scorpion, Scorpio. So interesting.

Now we go back to our wise men. We're still trying to figure these wise men out. Now, if a star rises in Jacob and a scepter comes out of Israel to smite the brow of Moab, and you're looking up in the sky for this star, what, there might be other comets and strange freakish astronomical occurrences that might come and go.

Haley's Comet is going to swing by every so often. What is it? Eighty nine years that Haley every eighty nine, something like that. Yeah, I know.

I know Mark Twain, I think, was born and died under Haley's Comet. But there could be all kinds of things. How would you know, as a wise man, his star has showed up? But what if that star appears in the Judah constellation? What if it appears in the Leo constellation? Because there's other constellations, you know, the ancient world, they had like sixty four total constellations.

These that we're talking about are the ones that ride the horizon that more or less they are the the edge constellations for the Northern Hemisphere, which is what we're talking about. You don't have your Southern Cross and the rest of it, but these are your Northern Hemisphere constellations. But you've got others that are in the middle.

And there were, I think the Greeks had identified over a thousand stars that could be seen with the naked eye, principal stars, main stars, not the sprinkling of dust that you can hardly identify. And they had organized these into several dozen constellations. But these twelve ring the scene.

And so if this it's got sixty three other constellations it can appear in, but it appears in the Judah constellation. Well, now we've got a clue, and if it lengthens from being a star that appears to being a scepter, that tells you something. The part, frankly, I have not figured out.

I don't think anybody else has either is smiting the brow of Moab. I haven't tried to triangulate and figure out if you're in Chaldea and you look at this thing at a certain time of the year. Does that constellation take you through Moab, across the plains of Moab, through that country? Does it rise? Is it a confluence where not only is all the rest of this true, but that constellation is right over the land of Moab from where you are? I can't work all that out.

I'm not I'm not a good enough. What is there's an astronomy program called Redshift, and you can put yourself on the planet and see what the sky looks like in any given year. And I'm just not that good.

Some kind of way Moab works into it, and I don't know how. It is interesting that David had such a strong connection with that, the victory over them. But here's my point.

These men, far removed from the land of Israel, are at this point apparently not visited by an angel, not given information in a dream, not sent a voice or Gabriel, as were the principal players, Zacharias and Mary and Joseph and others who are getting some very explicit communication. And yet when you think about it, they've got one of the toughest tasks there is. They've got to get from Cal, they figure, well, if it's a king of Israel, he's probably in Israel.

So they could figure that much out once they know the timing. But of all the generations of wise men, there's a strong suggestion that these men actually got their original start from Daniel and the scriptures that he had brought with him or had obtained during his long service in the governments of Babylon and later of the Medes and the Persians would have afforded them the scriptural part. But generation after generation and century after century passing, and these men know that it is the time we have seen his start.

That's the only clue they give us. But from the word of God, we can work out an awful lot of what they could have known, and this makes sense. Now, I draw two conclusions from this.

One, are they using something other than the Bible to figure out what to do? You know, there are people that get heavily into the idea of signs. Well, and I am not disputing that this can and does happen. I know people who literally almost put out the fleece.

They'll say, Lord, if you want me to do this, make this happen. If I need to talk to that person, have them call me, Lord, and I'll be ready and I'll take it as a sign from you. If they don't approach, if they don't make the first move, then I shouldn't talk to them.

But Lord, if you want me to broach this subject or address this issue or work on this problem with this person, then I will take it as a sign from you if they contact me. I know people that do this all the time. What I would say is whatever personal arrangements you make with the Lord is between you and the Lord.

He and I don't do things that way. I don't. Maybe I don't have the faith for it, but the Father and I have a different way of communicating.

I look in his word and I trust his word and I trust him to guide me in the word and let the counsel of my own thoughts. I hope that I'm mature enough to not need a cane tap on the side of the head. Not to say that if you get these signs, it's immature, but I would just like to think that God could guide me through his word and the counsel of my own soul and not use such an overt method.

But whatever works for you, it's between you and the Lord. I see nothing in scripture that precludes it. I see nothing in scripture that compels it.

It's in the realm of you ask and seek and knock and see what God has to say to you personally on that score. However, I will say that in this case, these guys didn't work out the time and the place from scripture alone. God gave them physical guidance and it's legitimate.

This is not a dispensational issue. These guys don't fall under either of the covenants, really. They're believers elsewhere.

I don't know how these guys get treated in the judgment. That's another thing that's in the counsel of God. But what I do feel confident in saying is if we want to know God's truth and we are assured that God wants us to know his truth, then we are going to find that information.

We will find what we need. These men were hungry. They wanted to know.

The shepherds tending their flocks wanted to know. They weren't just hapless bystanders. They weren't a random pick.

This wasn't a heavenly lottery where God took all the, you know, one ping pong ball for every living Israelite. And well, turns out it's Jedidiah there on the hillside. Go talk to him.

There was a reason the angel went there. We want to be those people. We want to be Simeon.

We want to be Anna. We want to be Joseph of Arimathea. We want to be Nicodemus.

We want to be Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee. We want to be those ladies who recognized Jesus for who he was because they were hungering and thirsting and they searched the scriptures and they pondered it in their hearts and they were ready. When God spoke, they were all ears and they knew what to do with the information.

These wise men didn't say, yeah, what do you know? Stars risen out of Jacob and it looks like it's smiting a brow Moab. I'll bet you there's a king being born over there in Israel. Well, pass me another, pass me another pate there.

I'm going to, you know, sop that up and take a nap. They wanted to know and it made a difference. It prompted them to act.

That's how much they cared about it. The shepherds made arrangements for their flocks to be cared for and they left at night after herding and shepherding all day long, they left at night to go search through the streets and alleys of Bethlehem and find this child and they didn't get a star, but they were locals. It didn't need to start.

They knew where to look. Didn't take them long, but they searched, they left, they got up and acted. So by way of, of interpretation and application for us, it's interesting to work out how they might have, have gotten there.

But to me, the significant thing at this season is the Lord Jesus Christ is here. He is just as much here as the night he was born. He is just as much here as the day the wise men found him and worshiped him and gave him gifts, offered him sacrifices of praise.

He is here. Do we have the same level of interest in being in his presence and offering our sacrifices of praise? Romans 12, 1 and 2, priestly offering of ourselves. Are we willing to get up

and move and look for the guidance that will take us to where we need to be so that we can worship him and appreciate him and in some way reflect his glory to others around us.

These men are in the book for all time and all eternity. There's not a generation of Christians that doesn't know about the wise men. There's never been a generation of Christians that didn't hear about the shepherds, not from day one.

They are an example. They are an encouragement. It doesn't matter how high or how low we may be.

If we're thirsty, by the way, you think about those cherub faces. Each of those tribes, tribe identifications reflects a part of the character and identity of the Lord Jesus. What did he say on the last great day of the feast? Oh, let us let him who is thirsty come to the water and drink.

He is the face of the man. He's the son of man. He's the water bearer.

He brings the water of life. An eternal monument to that is the river of life that flows out from under his throne in the kingdom of the father. He's the water bearer.

He's the lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the Eagle who does not defile himself by contact with the earth. Unlike the serpent who can't get away from it.

He's different than Satan and he is the ox. He is the magnificent full Olaf offering all on the altar, all given to worship and glorify God. Nothing left out.

Every part significant. Every part in some way reflecting he's all for. That's why the cherubim had those four faces.

That's why no cherub has the face of a snake or a scorpion on one side, because that's the face of failure. That's when you're given the opportunity to be great and be high and to serve and you fail it. But those four tribes, do you want to be the tribe of Dan or do you want to be the tribe of Judah? Do you want to be ultimately eliminated from the list and replaced? There's a lot of significance in this star and in the men who followed it and their immediate obedience.

Every time they get a signal from God, they immediately obey being warned. They return another way. They are as faithful as Joseph and Mary.

Every time they get a word from the Lord, every time they get a direction or a hint, they rejoice and are glad and they do exactly what God says. That's what God is looking for from us. That's the kind of sacrifice of praise that exceeds gold and frankincense and myrrh.

David says it isn't a matter of sacrifices that that's what you wanted. I would give it, but it is a broken heart and a contrite spirit, malleable and teachable, humble and dedicated to seeking and asking until we find that star will lead us just as it led those men to the Lord Jesus Christ. And where else would we want to be? Well, we're out of time for this study.

We'll close in prayer and after the holidays we'll pick up our study in the Kings and Prophets. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the account that we have of the coming into this world of your son, the Lord Jesus.

And having seen the glory and the intricacy of the outworking of your plan in that first advent, we await with great expectation being able to be a part of his second coming when he returns to this earth and fulfills all of your covenant promises to Israel. Having already fulfilled the wonderful promises to us. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts and give us time and space for contemplation and for appreciation in this busy season.

We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.