

Carl Hagensick - Magi

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The Magi.

As Brother Ray has said, the season is coming and we're all going to be getting lots of cards in the mail, and many of these cards are going to have pictures of those three kings of Orient. Why they have three, I don't know. But anyway, they have three. It makes a nice picture on the card.

We'd like to look at the incident together of the Magi. The visit to Jesus could be more of a factual discussion as we look at it today. Not so much a devotional or inspirational, but we'd like to, if time permits, delve into nine questions.

1. Who exactly were these wise men, the Magi?
2. When did they make their journey?
3. What was the import of the gifts they brought?
4. What were the practical effects of their visit?
5. What was the significance of the flight into Egypt?
6. What was the significance of the slaughter of the innocents?
7. We would like to look at the wise men in a parallel dispensation picture.
8. A typical significance of the wise men,
9. and then, if time permits, which I don't think it will, we'd like to get into an Old Testament prophecy about the wise men.

Those are the areas of discussion, if our time permits.

Who were the wise men? Many sources, if you look it up in Bible study and dictionaries, will say that they were men from the east, men of Persia. They may connect them with Zoroaster, they may connect them with Daniel or Jeremiah, but they almost all say that there is little known about them, that they're only mentioned here in the Scriptures.

We would like to suggest that that isn't true, that the Scriptures deal quite a bit with them in the Old Testament under various names, but that they pop up from time to time, and I think the most definitive passage is the earliest passage chronologically that talks about them. It's found in Jeremiah 39:3.

And as we read this passage, we're going to read it through quickly and then we're going to go through it rather slowly. It's one of these passages of the endless names mentioning you've got in the Bible.

He's talking about the invasion of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar in the ninth year of Zedekiah. Not the final invasion, but the penultimate, the last, second to last 1 second verse. He comes to the last invasion, the 11th year, and he says all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and they sat at the middle gate, and then he names them even Nergal, Sharezer, Shamgar, Nebo Sar, Shekim, Rabsaris, Nergal, Sharazzer, Rab Mag with all the residue of the Prince of the King of Babylon. How is that for a mouthful?

But really, we don't have, as it appear on the surface, six names in this passage, because as you check your concordances, you'll find out three of these are titles. You have three names, each given with their title. So if anybody ever asked you the trivia question, who was Nergal Shahrezzar? You fool them. You come back, say, which one?

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Because there were two Nergal Sharezers, and they're both mentioned in the same verse. But there was Nergal Sharezer, who was the Shamgar Nibal.

There was another Nergal Sharezer who was the Rab Mag, and there was Sar Shekim, who was the Rab Saras. The three words here, Shamgar, Rob Sarus and Rob Mog are all titles. If we had a blackboard, we would draw you an organizational chart to show you the layout of how the Kingdom of Persia operated. At the head, you had the king. Under the king, there were three officers that were directly answerable to the king.

Under these officers, you had phalanxes of other officers answerable to these. But these three were the three presidents of their empire. Their titles were the Shamgar, the Rav Sarus, and the Rav Mag. The Shamgar, to translate it, is the Cupbearer. He was the personal valet.

But the responsibilities of the Shamgar was much more than merely bearing the cup to the king. That was only a token duty. That was a ceremonial right. The real responsibility of the Shamgar, or the Cupbearer, was he was, to put it into 1986 parlance, the head of the Secret Service. His job was the security of the palace.

He was in charge of the police force, or the equivalent of it. He was in charge of the bodyguard for the king. His responsibility was the personal protection of the king's life, and as a result, it was a very important position, and he was rated one of the three top men.

If we didn't call him today the head of the Secret Service, we'd call him the chairman of the National Security Council. That's really the role that he played. National security, the defense was under the Shamgar Rab Sarras, by definition, means the chief eunuch. Bribery was every bit as much a part of ancient politics as is modern politics. So was corruption.

Unfortunately, some of the same tactics were used then that are used now, particularly in England. You see the many cases where the scandals relate to the use of prostitutes in order to get secrets out of Top government men. That's not a new practice, that's an old practice. That was the reason that important government servants were units in those days. So they would not be open to that temptation.

They were put into position where they would not have that temptation to before them, and the person that was over these, the Rab Sarras we would say in our parlance, was the head of civil service. His responsibility was the management of the government employees, and as a result that was a second area, then the third area, the rab Mog, if we're going to put that into our parlance. He was the head of health, education and welfare.

His responsibilities were the physicians and the scholars. Mog means wisdom, rob means head, the head of the wise men.

Mog is the same word from which the Greek word magi, from which we get wise men in Matthew comes up. It comes from the same root. It's a Chaldean root that's carried over. So he was the head of the wise men, and so the wise men were a third division of the governmental service in Persia.

The three divisions then were security, general, civil service, your clerical, all the other general employee, and the health, education and welfare of the nation. Now we're only interested in the magi. So we're going to forget the Shamgar and the Rabsaras. We don't need all those terms. Let's focus in on the Rav Mog.

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He in turn had under him four departments that he governed. These four departments are listed in Daniel the second chapter and the second verse, and again we have words that are accurately translated but perhaps did not convey to us the functions that were there portrayed. This is when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream. He naturally wanted education.

What did the dream mean? So he called the magi the wise men, and there were four divisions of them, and the king commanded to call the magicians and the astrologers and the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to show the king his dreams. This was the four divisions under the Ravmad.

Again, we're only going to lay our stress on one of these divisions. We'll mention them all. There were the magicians, and these were not only interested in what we would think is black magic. These were men who delved into those areas where there was inventiveness.

There was much of magic that was there, false magic, but there was much also in the lines of basic scientific invention of that time, there was the soothsayers, and they were primarily not only there to pronounce curses and to pronounce dates for curses to be pronounced. That's how it comes across to us. But they were the strategians. They made the strategy, the broad strategy for the king's operation, which included the date setting.

But they were a definite part of the cabinet under Education and Welfare. It was to have the strategy there. The Chaldeans was a school of philosophy that had been held down, and that was your basic educational system. Being in charge of the Chaldeans did not mean in charge of a nationality. The Chaldeans was a special term for a group of Chaldeans who had been educated in the deeper principles of the Babylonian philosophy.

So this was the school system that was under that section, and the astrologers and are here. The word is not astrologers in the old original, it's magi. This is the division of the Mag that was called the Magi, the wise men, and history says they were divided into two sections.

There were the stargazers, both astronomers and astrologers. There was certainly astrology going on, and there was another division of them that were the physicians. So there was these two divisions that came under this field. So then we find that these Magi come from a very definitive part of the Persian government.

It was a government in which one third of that government dealt specifically with the overall group of Magi, of which one fourth was the pacific Magi that were interested. Daniel 5:11 is a little more definitive yet. This is at Belshazzar's feast. There is a man in thy kingdom in whom was the spirit of the holy gods, and in the days of thy father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him whom the king Nebuchadnezzar, thy father, the king, I say thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers.

In other words, the position that Nergal Shirezer held in Jeremiah is now taken over by Daniel. Daniel is the Rab mad. He became the head of the entire Magi. He is the one who was referred to. Here we go on down to Daniel 5:29, the same chapter.

Yanoaz then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet and put a chain of gold upon his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. There were the three rulers, the Shamgar, the Rav Cyrus, and the Ravmad. He was the third. He was the ruler of the Rav mag.

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That was the position given to him in Daniel 5:11, Daniel 6. One gives us a further insight into who they were. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 princes, which would be over the whole kingdom and over these three presidents of whom Daniel was first. So under him the position of health, education and welfare, to use our terminology, became exalted to the top position.

It became the position of knowledge within the country. So this magi was an ancient tradition passed on as a royal part of the Persian government. It's even carried over into the New Testament. There are two names of magi given to us in the New Testament, and they're not Caspar or Melchior or whatever the third guy's name was supposed to be. I already forgot that one.

These. One of them you're very familiar with in Acts, the eighth chapter was Simon. Simon Magus Simon the sorcerer. Simon, who had picked up the knowledge of the magi in their distribution, had moved into the area and had become impressed with the ability of the Holy Spirit and said, I wish I could do some of those tricks. He was not pure, but he was of the Magi.

The other one is in Acts the 13th chapter. His name is variously known as Bar Jesus or Elymas, and he is listed as one of the Magi, the same term that is used for the wise men. So it is a tradition from Persia that was carried on all the way to the time of the Lord. We can prove that much from Scripture, and it was from here that these visitors came doesn't tell us how good they were, how bad they were, or anything else, just tells us where they came from.

Second area of inquiry: when did they make the journey?

Matthew 2 is the only source we have of the wise men's journey, and we're only going to read two verses to prove the timing of their journey. These verses speak of the flight into Egypt, and so they were there until the death of Herod. (Matthew 2:15) "That it might be fulfilled what is spoken of the Lord by the prophets saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Verse 19: "When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt."

There are two theories as to the timing of the wise men's visit. The one theory is that they appeared at the time or shortly after the time of the Lord's birth. The other theory is that they appeared when the Lord was two years old. The theory that says they appeared to the Lord as two years old is based on one word: When they came to the HOUSE where the YOUNG CHILD child lay - two (Greek) words: house and young child. It does not use the word infant, and it uses the word "house" as opposed to "manger," and so there are those who say that this shows that he must have been two years old at the time. We feel that that cannot be true, that he came at the time or about the time of Jesus birth because according to most historians - and we'll just quote William Filmer in his *Journal of Theological Studies* that in the chronology of the reign of Herod the Great, while there are various possibilities of placing his death, there is no way it can be placed later than 1 B.C. And if Jesus is born in 2 B.C., you don't have time for this trip to Egypt at the age of two.

Let's go back a little further on that. We know it was not in the first month of the infant's life, because in Luke 2 we have the record that when the days of purification were finished, Jesus was presented in the Temple of Jerusalem. Now the days for a male child for purification were 33 days. Therefore, assuming Jesus' birth on or about October 1, the presentation of the Temple would be on or about November 10th or 11th, in that time area of the presentation of the Temple. Herod's death can be placed at no later than February 25th of BC 1.

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So that almost forces the time period for the trip to Egypt as being approximately between the months November of BC 2, January and February of BC1, just about a three-month flight and stay in Egypt.

Now we've got a problem. Luke 23:9 apparently tells us otherwise. Luke 2:39, and remember, the Luke account does not deal with the wise men's visit at all. The Luke account picks up only the presentation of the Temple. It tells us when it happened, when the days of purification were finished. Age 33 days. Some say 33 plus 8; 41 because of the some count the 33 from the point of circumcision.

But in any case, 33 to 41 days. Luke 23:9 speaking after the temple, it says, "and when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth." Now you notice that gives you no time for a trip to Egypt. That merely says that when they finished in the Temple, they went to Galilee. But if Herod dies in BC 1, when they go to Galilee, they've got no time for Egypt at all, and we know they went to Egypt because Matthew 2 puts them in Egypt.

So, we need to harmonize. I would suggest that the simplest way of harmonizing this is to say that the Luke account is not dealing with the trip into Egypt or the wise men's visit. The Luke account is merely following certain course of events. As far as the Luke account goes, it says he's born, he's presented the Temple, he's up in Nazareth. It omits the wise men's visit so it doesn't say, "Immediately when these things were done, he went there," but the next thing in my account is he's there.

That the Matthew account needs to be interpolated here between verse 38 and 39 of Luke 2, that after the presentation of the Temple, you have the flight to Egypt, either directly or within a very short time afterwards. Whenever the flight was, and assuming that it was at the point of Jesus birth or very closely thereafter, the term "two years" is very significant. It can't be omitted because it's part of the Matthew record, and it's part of the record from a standpoint of its increasing importance.

I'd like you to notice again in Matthew 2:7, after they have come to Jerusalem and the wise men discuss where is this child to be born and they are told in Bethlehem. Then Herod calls to them, and Herod's question is this: He inquired them diligently what time the star appeared. Herod didn't care where it was, he didn't care where it left. He had one point in mind: when did you see it?

We don't know at this point what the wise men answered. We know the question. Herod wants to know when it appeared. Now if we go down further in the chapter, in verse 16 we find the answer. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked with wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and all the coasts from two years old and under."

Why? "According to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men." The whole implication is the wise men saw the star two years before. That it was not a margin of error that Herod was setting. The scripture account is he set the time because of the time he heard from the wise men. Therefore, the star appeared two years before Jesus was born. It was a pre-announcement.

Otherwise, we have them appearing when he's two years old. Well, this is interesting because you go to planetariums, and they present the star evidence of the star of Bethlehem, they almost

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always present it with the conjunction of planets in the year 4 BC and they say that proves that Jesus was born in 4 BC.

I would suggest it does the opposite; that the star evidence for 4 BC proves that he was born in 2 BC because the evidence is here that the star appeared two years before the slaughter of the innocents, and the slaughter of the innocents appeared sometime before Herod died, and therefore in 2 BC so that the star evidence is not out of accord of the Scriptures.

It did appear. You know, it's interesting and maybe not vital how that two-year period keeps cropping up. In Amos, the first chapter, you have the prophecy of desolation to Israel two years before the earthquake. The two-year pre-announcement.

In Genesis 11:10, you've got the first light appearing after the flood in the birth of a son to Arphaxad two years after the flood. Again, the two-year period. In the Garden of Eden, the presupposition is made of a two-year period before sin entered, based upon the difference between the chronologies pointing to 1872 and 1874, a constant recurrence of two years as a pre-warning period. Certainly, in the case of Jesus, it appears that there is factual evidence for a two-year pre-announcement of Jesus birth.

Moving on to our third question. We all know what the gifts were, and they brought unto him gold and frankincense and myrrh. Why those gifts? What is the import of them?

In Psalm 72:15 we have a psalm that talks about the queen of Sheba, and it tells us about a gift that she brought and he shall live, and to him shall be given the gold of Sheba. Prayer also shall be made for him continually and daily shall he be praised, and it's a psalm really of the Lord. It's a Messianic psalm, but it's picked up from the historical account in 1 Kings 10 where when the queen of Sheba comes, she brings gold. Gold is the gift that one brings to a king.

It designates his kingship. On the other hand, kings were not the ones who used Frankincense in Exodus 30:34 Leviticus 2:2 Leviticus 5:11. Frankincense is always the gift for a priest. Frankincense was that which was used in the priestly offerings.

But myrrh was always a wedding gift. Song of Solomon's 1:13 Song of Solomon 5:13 My beloved gave me a basket of myrrh to put between my breasts. Psalm 45:8 Esther 2:12 he received the gifts of the priest, king, and bridegroom. The acknowledgment of the three offices that he was to fulfill bridegroom, priest, and king symbolized so beautifully in the three gifts, each one for the given office that he would fulfill. What was the practical effect of the wise men's visit?

There are few incidents in history that had more reverberating effects than the visit of the wise men. It didn't just do one thing, it accomplished many things.

First thing it did was it precipitated the flight into Egypt. If the wise men had never come, there never would have needed to be a flight. Not that the wise men were against him, but they unwittingly brought the news to his enemy, and the enemy being informed, the Lord needed to send them out of the area of danger. The flight into Egypt was one of the very first signs of his messiahship that would be required Matthew 2:15 to fulfill prophecy. So the wise men's visit precipitated that flight, which was in itself a fulfillment of prophecy.

But not only did it precipitate the flight, like the Lord so often does, what he precipitates, he provides for it, provided for the flight. All the records regarding the store of activity, especially the

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Luke account, indicates a very poor family, no room for them. In the end, a family does not have means, certainly would not come prepared to take a stay of indefinite period in Egypt. The Call to the Journey but as the Lord forces the journey, he brings them the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh to pay for it. The provision is there not only that you have to have the journey, but he provides for it as well, just as he does with our journeys in life, whatever they may be.

He may force us out of comfortable surroundings, but he'll provide the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh to protect us. During that period, it did not only affect Jesus, it affected probably hundreds of innocent babies who lost their lives. The slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2:17 and 18 was a direct result of the wise men's visit. More about that later. Fourth, it demonstrated that the expectancy of the Messiah was not localized to Israel, but was in truth worldwide.

Even as Luke 3:15 so confidently states, let's take these effects and look at them and see their significance.

What was the significance of that flight into Egypt? Well, it was prophesied. That's what Matthew 2:13 says. So where was it prophesied? Hosea, the 11th chapter, the first verse.

This is the prophecy upon which the whole flight is based. When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. Nothing about the Messiah being called out of Egypt, nothing about a man named Jesus being forced to go into Egypt to be called out. But Israel was my son. Then I called him out of Egypt.

Seemingly it's a reference to the Exodus. Seemingly it's a reference to them being called out and not the Messiah of Israel, and yet Matthew says he was sent to Egypt, that it might be fulfilled. I have called my son out of Egypt. Notice the transfer from Israel to the Messiah of Israel.

How he takes the place not of the human race here, but he takes the place of Israel. In the writings of Pastor Russell, he suggests three applications of Hosea 11. We're going to give four. We think the fourth is equally harmonious with the other three. In reprint 1681 he suggests that it represents Israel affliction in Egypt for their own humbling, Based on Genesis 15:13, the making of the covenant and the calling of Egypt out of Israel.

Now reprint 436. He applies it not to Egypt's affliction, but to Jesus experience. Going into the world of mankind for the same kind of humbling and then being called back to the Father's throne as a prototype of his whole life, being sent into the Egypt of this world, being called back out of the Egypt of this world, back to the Father's throne. Based on Philippians 2, 8 in the third volume, page 316, he suggested as to the Church's experience, humbled and an atypical Egypt, that they also, Based on Revelation 11, eight are forced to go down to the Egypt to Babylon, and then they're called out. In addition to all of those, they would suggest a fourth one.

Mankind was sent into exile at the beginning of their career, and they too will be called out of that exile, out of the land of their affliction, as promised in Genesis 3:23 and 24. Interestingly enough, they were sent out at the age of two years, and this is at the age of two years or two years from the announcement you have this first sending out into the world. In every case it seems to show that what mankind has gone through in their exile from Eden, the Lord, in calling them back, has to go through the same experience. He too has to be exiled from his promised land.

He has to come into the world. He too will be called out of the world. That as Israel had been exiled as part of their humbling experiences, so the Lord, not only as the Savior of mankind, but as the

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Savior of Israel, has to go through the same experiences of the exile and the recall. So too must the church, in their identification with Christ, have the identical experiences that the Lord had. A sixth question.

What is the significance of the slaughter of the innocents? Picking up still on the Hosea prophecy, we noticed that when Israel went into Egypt, that also was accompanied by a slaughter of many people there. It was through the death caused by famine, the famine of many people that brought them down to the grave. But there are many who, for no other reason than God, was dealing with Jacob to bring him there. Many other people lost their lives.

The church's descent into Egypt is also accompanied by death and persecution. Revelation 2:10, that scripture we like to quote the last half of. But the first half speaking of the persecution, mankind's fall was accompanied by 6,000 years of dying. All we've noticed in these comparisons is that the flight into Egypt in any of the symbolic senses is accompanied by an experience akin to the death of the innocents, that many people lose their lives to get them back again in the kingdom. But there is that temporary loss.

But Matthew 2, when he talks about the slaughter of the innocents, does not relate that slaughter to the exodus of Egypt. It's an interesting comparison because there are things that do compare, but Matthew links it to something totally different. He links it to Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah 31, 15, 16, claiming that this is the prophecy fulfilled at the slaughter.

Thus saith the Lord. A voice was heard in Ramah with lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children because they were not. Thus saith the Lord. Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy works shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

That is a most unusual prophecy to quote about the slaughter of the innocents. If I could portray before your vision map of Israel, put Jerusalem here, it is to put Bethlehem about down here. Now, the voice of weeping was not heard in Bethlehem in the prophecy. It was heard in Ramah, which is up about here. Ramah was not involved in the slaughter of the innocents.

And yet he says the destruction of the infants is predicted by the voice of weeping over the children of Ramah. Why? Jeremiah 31 in its entirety. We like to quote the end of this so much about the new covenant, but it's in entirety. It is a prophecy dealing with the ravaging of Ephraim by Babylon.

Ephraim, as you recall, was Rachel's grandson. One of the major cities in Rephaim, Ephraim, was Ramah, and so Rama was the logical city to pick up in the prophecy, because he's talking about the purge of Ephraim by the forces that would come against them, that would center around Ramah. Matthew picks this up and said, that's only a figure that wherever there is Redemption there is purging. It linked the life and the death of Christ.

He came for the innocents that have died. It illustrated the effect of his death not only for the 10 tribe kingdom, the Ephraim that would cry for its dead, which dead would be restored. When it said, refrain thy voice from weeping. But it cried for the whole world. It showed that he came.

And with his death there is an acknowledgment of sin and acknowledgment of death as his penalty. But there is also the fulfilling of that prophecy not quoted, because not them do a refraining of the voice from weeping when the whole death process is to be reversed.

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The Wise Men in parallel dispensations we have a prophecy in Daniel the ninth chapter about the Lord's first advent. You know it well. 70 week prophecy in the midst of the week Messiah the prince would come, referring not to the birth of Jesus, but referring to his office as the anointed the Messiah, which he assumed at Jordan when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. We are dealing now in the wizard of the Wise Men with incidents that did not happen coincident with Messiah the Prince, but with 30 years prior, incidents that happened 30 years before he was prince wedding when he came as a babe at Bethlehem, and so, looking in the parallel dispensations based upon the double of Israel, we come not to the lord's return in 1874 that's parallel to his baptism, but 30 years prior.

We come to the year of 1844, to the height of the Miller movement and notice the correspondency. Like the wise men, many of those early Adventists were not in covenant relationship with God. Daniel 8:13 says so in so many terms. But nevertheless they came out of respect for the returned king. They came as a precursor to heal his presence.

They freely acknowledged him with gold, frankincense and myrrh, and that they acknowledged him as prophet and as priests and as bridegroom and as king. In Daniel 12:10 they're even styled wise men. The term is used of them at that point in time that these would be the ones who would be wise at the end of the 1290 days, and just like the slaughter of the innocents, they precipitated a great period of persecution, as shown in Daniel 8:14, the cleansing of the sanctuary.