

Beauties of the Truth

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Following the Star
Two Genealogies of Christ
Where Will All Nations Be Gathered?

BEAUTIES OF THE TRUTH is published as a service to the brethren to stimulate their consideration and appreciation of the boundless riches of God's Word. It is published free of charge. Subscriptions will be entered for all who request it. Address all correspondence to: Beauties of the Truth, 10034 SW 52nd Avenue, Portland, OR 97219. Editorial Board: Bros. Jerry Leslie (Managing Editor), Carl Hagensick, Raymond Luke, Michael Nekora, David Rice, Stephen Suraci.

Following the Star¹

Matthew 2:1-12 (Translations are from the NASV)

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him” And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he *began* to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, “**And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel.**” Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, “Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him” And having heard the king, they went their way; 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. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.”

No more detail than this is recorded. The star is not mentioned at all in the gospels of Mark, Luke and John. One must ponder a central question: Was the star a miracle, a natural object or both? Historians, astronomers, all of us have wondered. Let us look at the story, the mystery behind the star of Bethlehem and the secret midnight visit in more detail before deciding.

First we notice a precedent in the Old Testament prophecies for expecting such a visit from Gentile nobles. Numbers 24:17, "A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel ." Psalms 72:10, "Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before him. " Isaiah 60:3, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."

We acknowledge that these texts have a symbolic and grander application beyond the birth of our savior. We see them with an application to the inauguration and acceptance of earth's new King by the whole world. But to the Jewish mind and those ancients who regarded the word of the prophets as sacred, they saw them pointing to the one "born King of the Jews, " born to be King and Messiah. This application is not to be disregarded.

As for the Magi, there is a mass of contradictory traditions concerning their rank, their country, their number and names. The text does not say there were three. This is assumed based on the number of gifts offered. Matthew does not say they were kings, nor does he identify their country of origin. Their audience with Herod indicates they were persons of high esteem. Herod granted them passage in the land and asked them to report their finding. Herod regarded their presence with utmost concern, so much so that upon discovering their report was not returned, he had newborn males slain in an attempt to prevent the prophecy of a newborn king.

We are only told these Magi were "from the east." It will be noticed that these "wise men" were not Jews, for they were seeking "He who has been born King of the Jews." They appeared to be familiar with some of the Jewish prophecies but were also guided by astrological evidence. They came to Jerusalem, seeking him in the royal city, but were not sufficiently aware of the prophecy of Micah 5:2 cited by the chief priests, that Bethlehem would have the honor of bringing forth the Messiah.

The name "Magi" is the Greek *magos*, plural *magoi*. It corresponds to the Hebrew *Mag*. While the priests were known by the general name of *Magi*, they were also known by the name of *wise men*, and likewise *Chaldeans* (Isaiah 44:25, Jeremiah 50:35, Daniel 2: 12-27, 4:6, 18, 5:7, 11, 12, 15). To their number doubtless belonged the astrologers and star-gazers of Isaiah 47:13. Also the Chaldee soothsayers and dream interpreters either denote various orders of Magi, or they are merely different names of the same general class (Daniel 1:20, 2:2, 10, 27, 5:7, 11).

This name has come to us through the Greeks as the designation of the priests and wise men among Medes, Persians and Babylonians. We do not understand, however, that Magism was originally a Persian institution. The earliest notice extant of the Magi is in the prophecies of Jeremiah (39:3, 13), where mention is made of Rab-mag, a term which signifies *chief magus* or *chief of the magi*. In Jeremiah 50:35 the same class is referred to under the designation of the "wise men of Babylon. " In the time of Daniel we find the institute in full force in Babylon (Daniel 2:2, 12, 18, 24, 4:3, 15, 5:7, 8). This denotes the existence among the Chaldeans of the magian institute in a regular form and recognized in the state prior to 600 BC.

Other than Biblical sources, we have records from the historians Herodotus and Xenophon on this subject. A contemporary of Herodotus, Xanthos of Lydia, was the first to mention Zoroaster. These and other sources indicate a connection of the Magi with Zoroaster. Histories place Zoroaster in the area of northeastern Iran or its environs about 1000 BC. He taught monotheism and claimed to be of the Magi. This implies the order existed even before this. Ancient traditions place Enoch as the father of astronomy, and higher sciences including numerous zodiacal ideas. If this is true, searching for the wisdom of the Creator and of prophecies may have had a very early beginning.

Yet like all truth, this knowledge was also compromised by Satanic influence, corrupted and modified to accommodate the customs of each culture. By the time Daniel was called to the courts of Babylon, the wise men

were unable to discern Nebuchadnezzar's dream or its meaning. Only when Daniel appealed to the God of heaven was he able to explain the mysteries. After this, Daniel was made the head of the order of wise men or Magi. We cannot doubt that Daniel would have taught them the source of true wisdom. He who prayed daily toward Jerusalem would not have hesitated to instruct them in the promises and prophecies of the holy Word as he knew it from Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. This combined with their knowledge of a divine order indicated in the constellations, revived the vitality of the Magi as an order of watchers.

However corrupt true wisdom became, truth has a way of prevailing through time and history. It is usually the few earnest watchers, the few who appeal to the God of the universe, who are found watching and waiting at the right moment. Besides Enoch, God blessed others with great knowledge and wisdom. There was Noah, Melchizedek, Job and Jethro, the priest of Midian. All who are touched by the power of truth are changed in some way. It is not strange that the Magi preserved some sacred knowledge from the ancient teachers. If Genesis 1:14 and Job 38:31-33 are clues that God has also written his purposes in the stars and their constellations, it is likely that these Magi were watching the stars for a special sign of the king of the Jews. It is quite possible they appreciated a deeper meaning of Psalms 19:1-6 as rendered from Rotherham and Moffat.

“The heavens are telling the story of God, and the work of his hands the expanse is declaring. Day unto day doth pour forth speech and night unto night doth breathe out knowledge. Day after day takes up the tale, night after night makes him known. There is no speech and there are no words, unheard is their voice! Yet through all the earth hath gone forth their voice, and to the end of the world their sayings. Their speech has never a word, not a sound for the ear, yet their message spreads the wide world over, their meaning to the earth's end. For the Sun hath he set a tent therein; and he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. He rejoiceth as a hero to run a race. From one end of the heavens is his going forth and his circuit to the other end thereof.”

Two major phenomena in the night sky are noted by astronomers. One is an apparent conjunction of planets. This occurs when two or more planets appear closely aligned. One is actually in the foreground and the other in the background, though they are millions of miles apart. The second event is a supernova, a sort of stellar explosion. This flaming can make a star increase ten thousand to one hundred thousand times its usual brightness. This high luminosity is reached in a few days and may be maintained for a week or two. The decline in brightness is gradual and amounts to 15 or more magnitudes in a few years. There have only been six supernovas observed in the last 1000 years. These were in the years 1006, 1054, 1151, 1572, 1604 and the last in 1987.

Johannes Kepler, the great astronomer of the seventeenth century, calculated that the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which took place before the supernova of 1604, must have also occurred before at the time of Jesus' birth. Kepler did not interpret the conjunction of planets as equivalent to the Bethlehem star, but rather the nova that appeared at the same time as the triple conjunction. Other theories have emerged including almost every phenomenon of the sky: comets, meteors, ball lightning, the northern lights, supernovae, variable stars and planets.

To our thinking, the supernova theory is the most plausible. Only the Creator who set the laws of physics in motion knew just how many thousands of years it would take for its light to reach the earth and from what perspective and position it could be seen. It would not be seen earlier with such magnitude. Though others may have noticed the phenomena, it would not carry the same significance as for those watching the night sky for planet conjunctions and star changes in notable constellations. Except for the appearing of the angels, neither the shepherds nor others mention extraordinary celestial light. This could relate to the flaring stage of the supernova and the Magi arriving later in the diminishing phases, having earlier been motivated by the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn.²

CONSTELLATION VIRGO

The ancients recognized the constellation Virgo as the sign of the virgin mother from whom the Redeemer-King was to be born. It is an astronomical determination that a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter occurred in the deacon constellation of Virgo in these last years we call BC. This deacon constellation is named Coma, the special sign of the infant seed of the woman. If a supernova also appeared in the constellation of Coma, this would most certainly alert the star watchers. The Magi do not say “we saw *a* star in the east,” but “*his* star in the east.” This indicates the star of the child.

Matthew records that the star went before them. We cannot conceive of a better way to follow a star than by going to a place where it would be positioned directly overhead on the meridian. Because of the motion and path of the earth, the stars appear to move from east to west, and do not pause. As sunlight obscures the stars by day and clouds sometimes by night, the observation procedure would have to be carefully regulated. It seems appropriate that the Magi would observe this star position exactly at midnight of each day that the stars were visible. They could tarry by the side of various deep wells to take multiple midnight observations. For this purpose, a well with perpendicular walls would serve as a fixed observatory. It is by means of such a well, and its reflection of the sun at Syene in Egypt, that the lines of the tropic were determined. So by looking down the well and observing the reflection of their bright star in the still water at the bottom, these wise men could find with great accuracy if it were exactly vertical over them. So the tradition is that they looked into the well and saw their star, and perceived that it “stood over where the young child was”

THREE GEMS OF TRUTH

Finally these nobles brought the young child gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which were the customary gifts of subject nations (Genesis 43:11, 1 Kings 10:2, 10, 2 Chronicles 9:24, Songs 3:6, 4:14). So perhaps here lies the first hidden beauty of this midnight visit. Here is a token fulfillment of Psalms 72:11 when all the kings will eventually bow down before him.

The second treasure of truth is the token that the “Gentiles shall come to his light” (Isaiah 60:3). This was further fulfilled when the Gospel was turned to the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name and will ultimately be realized in the kingdom when all nations shall come to his light.

The third gem of truth is found in the gifts that were offered to the child. Frankincense was the primary ingredient used in the tabernacle and sanctuary. It produced a sweet fragrance when burned. So Jesus' life was marked at its beginning as one of praise. The gift of myrrh indicated this praise would be offered in sacrifice. Indeed, myrrh was the prime ingredient for embalming and was used for Jesus' burial. The symbolic gift of gold was fully realized by Jesus upon his resurrection to the glories of the divine nature.

With this, the mysterious visitors passed from history, leaving only their gifts behind. “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth ...” (John 1:45)

- Jerry Leslie

Resources:

C. T. Russell, *R1674, R3703, R4098*

F. W. Farrar, *Life of Christ*

J. K. Hanson, *The Star of Bethlehem*

McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*

J. A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars*

E. M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*

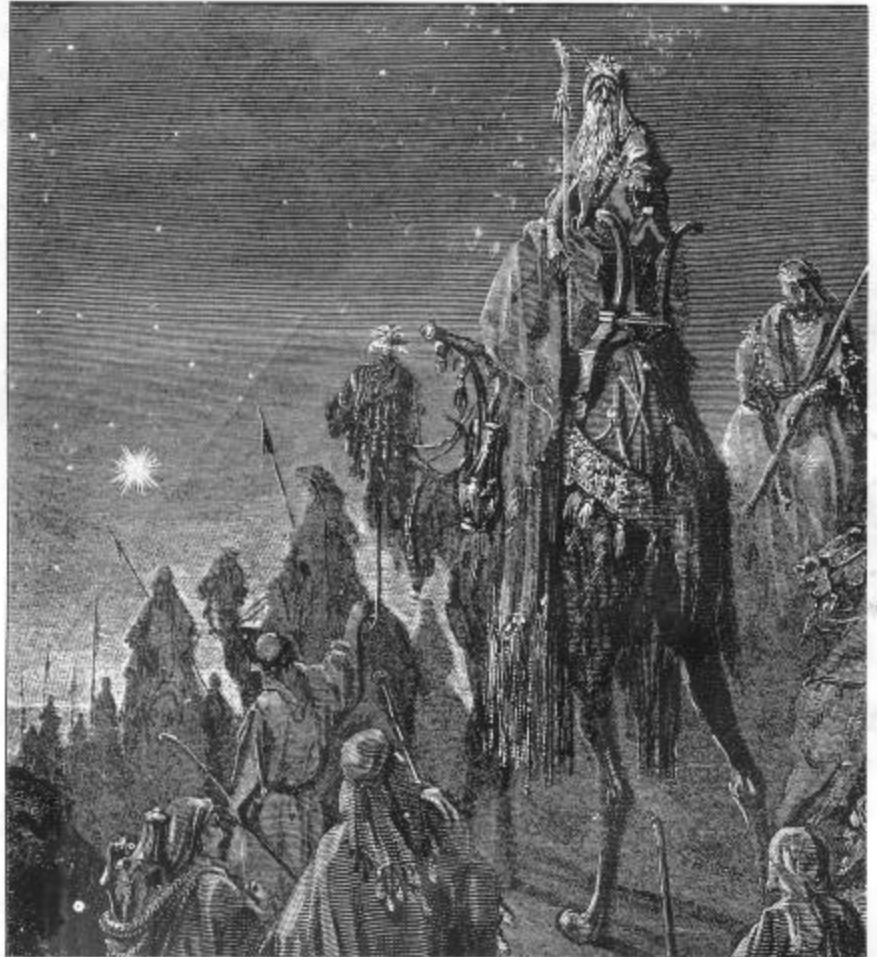
² Our best information is that this conjunction began late in BC 8. Another conjunction between Jupiter and Venus occurred in June BC 2. A supernova in BC 2 would have heightened the significance for star watchers.

Two Genealogies of Christ

Sceptics of all ages have urged the impossibility of reconciling the difficulties in the two accounts of the descent of Jesus. Even Alford says it is impossible to reconcile them. But certainly several possible explanations have been suggested. The chief difficulties will be discussed.

1. In Matthew's list several discrepancies are pointed out.

(a) It is objected that Matthew is mistaken in making three sets of fourteen each. There are only forty-one names, and this would leave one set with only thirteen. But does Matthew say he has mentioned forty-two names? He does say (Matthew 1:17) that there are three sets of fourteen and divides them for us himself- "So all the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen generations; and from David unto the carrying away to Babylon fourteen generations; and from David unto the Christ fourteen generations." The points of division are David and the captivity; in the one case a man, in the other an event. He counts David in each of the first two sets, although Jechoniah is counted only once. David was the connecting link between the patriarchal line and the royal line. But he does not say "from David to Jechoniah" but "from David to the carrying away unto Babylon," and Josiah is the last name he counts before that event. And so the first name after this same event is Jechoniah.. Thus Matthew deliberately counts David into two places to give symmetry to the division which made an easy help to the memory.



The Wise Men Guided by the Star

(b) The omissions in Matthew's list have occasioned some trouble. These omissions are after Joram, the names of Ahaziah, Joash., Amaziah, and after Josiah, those of Jehoiakim and Eliakim¹ (2 Kings 8:24, 1 Chronicles 3:11, 2 Chronicles 22:1, 11, 24:27, 2 Kings 23:34, 24:6). But such omissions were very common in the Old Testament genealogies. See 2 Chronicles 22:9. Here "son of Jehoshaphat" means "grandson of Jehoshaphat." So in Matthew 1:1 Jesus is called the son of David, the son of Abraham. A direct line of descent is all it is designed to express. This is all that the term "begat" necessarily means here. It is a real descent. Whatever omissions were made for various reasons would not invalidate the line. The fact that Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah were the sons of Ahab and Jezebel would be sufficient ground for omitting them.

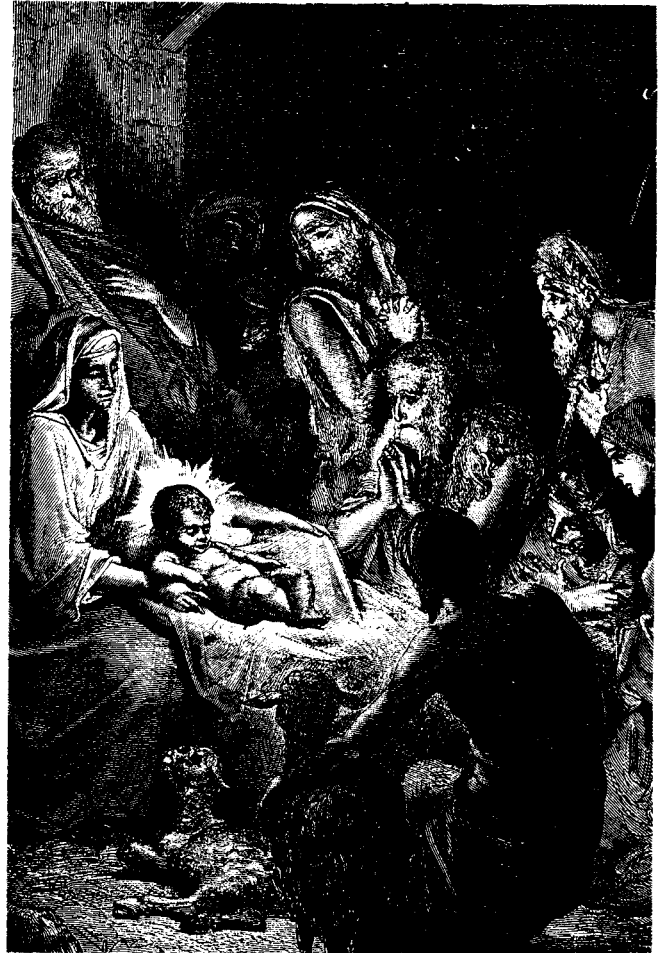
(c) Matthew mentions four women in his list, which is contrary to Jewish custom, viz. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and

the wife of Uriah.² But none are counted in the lists of fourteen, and each one has something remarkable in her case. Three were guilty of gross sin, and one, Ruth, was of Gentile origin³ and deserved mention for that reason.⁴ This circumstance would seem to indicate that Matthew did not simply copy the genealogical history of Joseph. He did this, omitting what suited his purpose and adding likewise remarks of his own. His record is thus reliable and yet made a part of his own story.

2. A comparison of the lists of Matthew and Luke.

If no list had been given by Luke, no further explanations would be necessary. But Luke not only gives a list, but one radically different from Matthew's, and in inverse order. Matthew begins with Abraham and comes to Jesus; Luke begins with Jesus and concludes with Adam [the son of God]. Several explanations are offered to remove the apparent contradiction.

(a) As early as Julius Africanus it was suggested that the two lines had united in accordance with the law of Levirate marriage. By this theory, Heli and Jacob being stepbrothers, Jacob married Heli's widow and was the real father of Joseph. Thus both genealogies would be the descent of Joseph, one the real, the other the legal. It is argued that Jechoniah's children were **born in captivity** and so, being slaves, lost both his royal dignity and his legal status. Stress is laid upon the word "begat" to show that Matthew's descent must be the natural pedigree of Joseph, and upon the use of the expression "son (as was supposed) of Joseph * " Hence both Joseph's real and legal standing are shown, for by Luke's account he had an undisputed legal title to descend from David. 'his is certainly possible, although it rests on the hypothesis of the Levirate marriage.



The Nativity

(b) Lord Arthur Hervey, in his volume on the Genealogies of Our Lord, and in Smiths Dictionary, argues that Matthew gives Joseph's legal descent as successor to the throne of David. According to this theory Solomon's line failed in Jechoniah (Jeremiah 22:30) and Shealtiel of Matthew's line took his place. Luke's account, on the other hand, gives Joseph's real parentage. Matthew's Matthan and Luke's Mattathias are identified as one, and the law of Levirate marriage comes into service with Jacob and Heli. This explanation has received favor with such writers as Mill, Alford, Wordsworth, Ellicott, Westcott, Fairbairn. McNeile (on Matthew) considers this the "only possible!" view. The chief objection seems to be the most natural meaning of "begat," implying direct descent, and the necessity for two suppositions, one about Shealtiel and another about Jacob and Heli. It is even fairly probable that the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Matthew and Luke are different persons.

THE MOST PLAUSIBLE SOLUTION

The most plausible solution yet suggested makes Matthew give the real descent of Joseph, and Luke the real descent of Mary. Several arguments of more or less weight can be adduced for this hypothesis.

- (1) The most natural meaning of “begat” in Matthew is preserved. Jesus goes through David's royal line and so fulfills prophecy. It is not elsewhere stated that Mary was of Davidic descent, although presumptive evidence exists in the language of the angel (Luke 1:32) and the enrollment of Mary (Luke 2:5).
- (2) The use of Joseph without the article, while it is used with every other name in the list. “The absence of the article puts the name outside of the genealogical series properly so-called” - Godet. This would seem to indicate that Joseph belonged to the parenthesis, “as was supposed” It would read thus, “being (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli.” Luke had already clearly stated the manner of Christ's birth, so that no one would think he was the son of Joseph.
- (3) It would seem proper that Matthew should give the legal descent of Jesus, since he wrote chiefly for Jews. This, of course, could only be through Joseph.
- (4) And it would seem equally fitting that Luke should give the real genealogy of Jesus, since he was writing for all. And this could come only through Mary. If it is objected that a woman's genealogy is never given, it may be replied that women are mentioned for special reasons in Matthew's list, though not counted, and that Mary's name is not mentioned in that list. The genealogy goes back to her father either by skipping her as suggested above and making son mean the grandson of Heli, or by allowing Joseph to stand in her place in the list, as he would have to do anyhow. On the whole, then, this theory seems the most plausible and pleasing.

- A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 1922

1 Jehoiakim and Eliakim are two names for the same person (2 Kings 23:34).

2 Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3).

3 Rahab was also a Gentile living in Jericho at the time of its fall.

4 Each of these women rose above the stigma of their past to become a mother in the genealogy of the Messiah.

Where Will All Nations Be Gathered?

The concept of a “gathering of all nations” to the final battle between good and evil is a common one in Biblical prophecy. Seven different Old Testament prophecies refer to this event, as well as the well known reference to “Armageddon” in Revelation.

However, though there are numerous references to such a gathering - and, being in end-time prophecies, they all appear to refer to the same event -there is a lack of agreement as to the typical location of the gathering. Three specific geographic localities in Israel are mentioned as the focal point for this confrontation - Megiddo, the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem, and the Valley of Jehoshaphat. It is the aim of this article to examine these three localities, the similarities that join them and the differences between them.

ARMAGEDDON

“For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty ... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew ,tongue Armageddon.” - Revelation 16:14, 16

There is wide-spread agreement that the coined term “Armageddon” refers to the fortress city of Megiddo. In the opening paragraph of the 1912 Foreword to *The Battle of Armageddon*, we find reference to four Old Testament battles at this site: (1) Gideon and his band of 300 versus the Midianites, (2) the defeat of King Saul by the Philistines, (3) the death of King Josiah in his battle with Pharaoh Necho, and (4) the dwelling of wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel in the nearby city of Jezreel (Judges 7:19-23, 1 Samuel 31:1-6, 2 Chronicles 35:22-25, 2 Kings 9:30-37).

To these can be added the conflict between Barak and the forces of Sisera, the death of King Ahaziah at the hand of Jehu, and the death of King Zechariah, the last of the Jehu dynasty, killed by Shallum (Judges 4,5, 2Kings 9:27, 15:10, *The Living Bible*). Three other important battles, not recorded in the Old Testament, which occurred at this fortress were victories under the Egyptian pharaohs Thutmose III, Seti I, and Sheshonk I (the Shishak of 1 Kings 14:25). It was here also that the apocryphal book of Judith has the Israelitish forces stopping the Assyrian general Holofernes at the pass of Megiddo which was wide enough “for two men at the most” (Judith 4:7). It was also here, in more modern times, where General Edmund Allenby fought the decisive battle which led to the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1917.

Each of the Biblical battles of Megiddo adds certain details to the overall picture of the prophesied Armageddon conflict. In the battle of Deborah and Barak versus Sisera we see how God fights through the overflowing of the river Kishon. Similar symbology is used in the final battle in Isaiah 28:15-18. The Gideon battle illustrates how the army on the Lord's side is pared down to the small number of faithful and watching ones. The revenging dynasty, that of Jehu, met its final end at the same place when Shallum killed King Zechariah.

Even the non-Biblical battles of Thutmose III and that recorded in the book of Judith give us details of geography that show the strategic importance of Megiddo. The successful attack of Thutmose was the result of a surprise entry of his army through what was considered an impossible pass from the heights of Mount Carmel into the Jezreel Valley. The book of Judith refers to still another mountain pass, that of the Via del Maris, as it ascended into the Galilean highlands near the city of Nazareth. These two incidents, combined with the death of Ahaziah in the “ascent of Gur” (2 Kings 9:27), show how fitting was the expression “the mountains (Greek, *Har*) of Megiddo’ in the term “Armageddon”

But it is the battle of Josiah that appears to be the focal point of the Megiddo illustration. This was the only one of the Megiddo battles to be picked up in the books of the minor prophets (though the battle of Gideon is also referenced in Psalms 83:9-11). It is to that incident that Zechariah refers when predicting the eventual conversion of Israel: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon” (Zechariah 12:9-11).

The account of this battle is given in 2 Chronicles 35:20-27. At first reading it may appear that Josiah became foolishly involved in this battle. However it must be remembered that the god of Necho is not the God of the Israelites, and that God had given Josiah an unconditional promise that he would go to the grave in peace (2 Chronicles 34:28). It therefore appears that Josiah's intervention was justifiable and, though he died in warfare, he had peace of mind in knowing that he had died for the right cause.

The net effect of the battle was to encourage the Babylonians to cross the Euphrates some four years later in retaliation for Nechds battles. It may be more than coincidental that the Armageddon battle of Revelation has one effect of drying up the Euphrates, “that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared” (Revelation 16:12). However it must also be remembered that the primary reference in the Revelation text is most probably to the diverting of the Euphrates by Cyrus when he overthrew Babylon in the days of Belshazzar (Daniel 5:30). Although challenged by the Encyclopedia Britannica, this diversion of the waters is supported by the noted historian of the fifth century BC, Herodotus.

THE KIDRON VALLEY

By far the greatest number of references to a “gathering” of all nations in the Old Testament refer not to Megiddo but to the Kidron Valley, which separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The most prominent of these is found in Zechariah 14:2-4, “For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley, and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south”

It was here that Nebuchadnezzar set siege against Jerusalem and gathered “all the kingdoms of earth of his dominion” (Jeremiah 34:1). This is referred to in prospect as the gathering of “many nations” in Micah 4:11. It was also here that Sermacherib gathered his multi-national army against Hezekiah. Jerusalem also appears to be the backdrop of Zephaniah's prophecy, “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zephaniah 3:8). It is probable that this same scene formed the setting for the famous end-time prophecy of the “gathering of the armies of the north” against Jerusalem in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

In the Kidron Valley prophecies we see the other side of the coin from that which is shown in the pictures of Megiddo. In the latter we see the outcome of the battle as being victorious for Israel, while in the former we see one purpose of the battle is for the chastisement of God's chosen people.

THE VALLEY OF JEHOSHAPHAT

Of all the geographical settings for the final conflict of the ages, the most difficult to decipher is “the valley of Jehoshaphat” “ In Joel 3:2 we read “I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.”

Both Bible Students and commentators are divided in their opinion as to which valley is meant in this passage. Some, noting verse 14 where it is termed “the valley of decision,” assume that this is a play on words for the name Jehoshaphat, meaning “Jehovah has judged,” that is, “God has made his decision” However, the Hebrew word rendered “decision,” is not etymologically related to “Jehoshaphat” and is open to a wide number of translations, as removed as “threshing instrument” and “gold” from the thought of “decision” “ though that appears to be a legitimate rendering of the verse under study.

A second opinion is that this term relates to the Kidron Valley which has been called “the valley of Jehoshaphat” for centuries. This appears remote however, since that designation was not popularly given to the Kidron until the fourth century AD and has been historically advocated by Muslim expositors who feel that the final judgment of the dead will literally take place in this valley. Further, the Kidron is always called a *nachal*, or sharp ravine, and never an *emek*, a broad valley, as is used in the Joel text.

As an interesting side note, the following comment from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia should be noted: “It is impossible not to suspect that there is some connection between the name Jehoshaphat and the name of a village near the head of this valley - Shaphat; perhaps at one time it was Wady Shaphat, which name would readily suggest the traditional one”

A third opinion favored by many Bible Students is the valley [*emek*, broad valley] of Berechah, between Jerusalem and Hebron, where the forces of Jehoshaphat met in battle with the combined armies of Ammon, Edom [Mt. Seir], and Moab. In this battle, in answer to an impassioned prayer by Jehoshaphat, he was able to assure the people that “the battle is not yours, but God's” (2 Chronicles 20:15). The Hebrews were then told to play instruments and sing hymns and God would fight the battle for them. The method used by the Lord was to “set ambushments” against them. This probably means that the enemies had set up ambushes and became confused and killed each other in a crossfire, or more likely that bands of local marauders had established ambushes, or as many translations put it “liers-in-wait.”

The parallels between this and Zechariah 14 are manifest. In both cases God is the one to fight the battle and gain the victory and in both instances the method used was causing anarchy among the enemies of the Lord's people. This also forms a striking parallel with the battle of Gideon versus Midian (Judges 7:22).

However there is still another valley connected with the battles of Jehoshaphat, recorded in 1 Kings 22. In this confrontation Ahab, king of Israel, seeks to make an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to fight the Assyrians at Ramoth Gilead in Gad. Before agreeing to the alliance Jehoshaphat asked Ahab for some confirmation of victory. Ahab called his paid prophets who conveniently predicted such a victory. But still unconvinced, he sought counsel from “a prophet of the Lord.” Micaiah, a true prophet who had been imprisoned for speaking ill of Ahab, was brought forth and correctly predicted the death of Ahab in the battle.

The correspondences between this confrontation and the sixth plague of Revelation are striking. In both scenarios there is an alliance of three forces -beast, dragon and false prophet in Revelation, and Ahab, Jehoshaphat and the false prophets in the King's account. In both the force which draws them into the battle is

the message of the false prophets. The death of Ahab and, presumably of the false prophets, is paralleled in the details of the sixth and seventh plagues in Revelation 19, where the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

Hugh Schonfeld in *The Bible Is Right* even makes a case for the derivation of the name Armageddon in Revelation from Ramoth Gilead of Gad. His thesis is based on the observation that the most reliable Greek manuscripts of Revelation spell Armageddon with only one “d,” whereas Megiddo has two “d’s. “ However the argument is greatly weakened by noticing that the Septuagint version of the Old Testament not only spells “Megiddd’ with but one “d” on occasion, but also spells it both “Megadd’ and “Megaddd’ as well. The spelling appears to be arbitrary to the translator. However, we note for the consideration of the reader the steps Schonfeld suggests to move from Ramoth Gilead of Gad to Armagedon (with one “d”). (See the box at the bottom of this page.)

THE MEANING OF ARMAGEDDON

In closing this examination we want to look briefly at the definition of Armageddon in the original Hebrew language, for so it is attributed in the Revelation 16 account. Strong's Concordance defines it as either the mountain (*Har*) or the city (*Ar*) of Megiddo. The Hebrew for Megiddo is further defined as place of crowds or spot of rendezvous. However others, including Pastor Russell in his 1912 Foreword to Volume 4 of *Scripture Studies*, gives it as “mount of destruction “

This discrepancy in definition is easy to explain. While Professor Strong defines it as a place of meeting or rendezvous, he ascribes the root for Megiddo to *gadad* (Strong's 1413) which means to gash, and comes from number 1464, *guwd*, meaning “toattack “ Both meanings blend well into the realities of the Armageddon picture.

Similarly, there is disagreement as to whether Har means a single mountain or a mountain range. Vine7s gives it the plural meaning, while Strong implies the singular. Actually both are appropriate. Megiddo is surrounded by low-lying hills, Jenin to the immediate south, Carmel to the west, Gilboa to the east and Tabor to the northeast. Thus the precise definition of Armageddon is more of an academic than a vital interpretive question.

SUMMARY

In summary, the name Armageddon for the final battleground seems particularly chosen, not only for its primary allusion to the many decisive battles at Megiddo, but also because it can be combined with other symbols where the “gathering” concept is used to illustrate further details of the climactic skirmish which will end the present world order and fully introduce the Messianic Kingdom.

- Carl Hagensick

Ramoth Gilead of Gad is also known in the Bible (2 Kings 8:2) as **Ramah**

There being “Ramahs” in other tribes, this one was known as **Rarnah-Gad**

By New Testament times this city was part of the Decapolis, cities with Grecian influence, designated with the prefix for Greece, Ionia or Ion. Thus **Ramah-Gad-Ion**

In Hebrew to Greek transliterations, the “Ra7 opening often becomes “Ar,” thus Joseph from Ramathea is called “Joseph of Arimathea” With this device. **Arma-Gad-Ion**

Or, the more familiar **Armagedon.**