

Blandford and Langton Home Groups

Meeting for Week Beginning 13 January 2008

Focus At Home “The Bible - The Big Picture”

“Notes on the Magi”

From “The Fourfold Gospel”

The word, Magi, designates an order, or caste, of priests and philosophers which existed in the countries east of the Euphrates, from a very remote period. We first find the word in Scripture at Jer 39:13, in the name rab-mag, which signifies chief magi. This class is frequently referred to in the Book of Daniel, where its members are called magicians, and it is probable that Daniel himself was a rab-mag (Da 5:11). The order is believed to have arisen among the Chaldeans and to have come down through the Assyrian, Medean and Persian kingdoms. The magi were, in many ways, the Levites of the East; they performed all public religious rites, claimed exclusive mediatorship between God and man, were the authority on all doctrinal points, constituted the supreme council of the realm, and had charge of the education of the royal family. They practiced divination, interpreted auguries and dreams, and professed to foretell the destinies of men. They were particularly famous for their skill in astronomy, and had kept a record of the more important celestial phenomena, which dated back several centuries prior to the reign of Alexander the Great. They were probably originally honest seekers after truth, but degenerated into mere imposters, as the Bible record shows (Ac 8:9-11 and Ac 13:8). Nothing is said as to the number who came nor as to the country whence they came. The number and quality of the gifts has become the foundation for a tradition that they were three kings from Arabia, and during the Middle Ages it was professed that their bodies were found and removed to the cathedral at Cologne. Their shrine is still shown there to credulous travelers, and their names are given as Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

From the east. Probably from Persia, the chief seat of the Median religion. Jews dwelling in Persian provinces among the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites (Ac 2:9) may have so prepared the minds of the magi as to set them looking for the star of Bethlehem. But in addition to the knowledge carried by captive Israelites, the men of the East had other light. The great Chinese sage, Confucius (B.C. 551-479), foretold a coming Teacher in the West, and Zoroaster, the founder of the Persian religion, who is thought to have been a contemporary of Abraham, had predicted the coming of a great, supernaturally begotten Prophet. To these Balaam had added his prophecy (Nu 24:17). Moreover, the Septuagint translation made at Alexandria about 280 B.C. had rendered the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, the language of commerce, and had carried the knowledge of Hebrew prophecy into all lands, and had wakened a slight but world-wide expectation of a Messiah. The Roman writers, Suetonius (70-123, A.D.) and Tacitus (75-125, A.D.) bear witness to this expectation that a great world-ruling king would come out of Judaea. But all this put together can not account for the visit of the magi. They were guided directly by God, and nothing else may have even influenced them.