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THE WISDOM OF THE WISE MEN

BY RICHARD JORDAN

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

"Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matt.2:1,2).

We are not told how soon after His birth this visit took place, but no doubt considerable time had elapsed. Popular notions gained from so-called "Nativity Scenes," depicting the wise men and shepherds worshipping together before "the babe lying in a manger" simply do not fit the facts.

From Matthew 2:2 it seems clear that the wise men first saw the star at the time of Christ's birth. After the necessary preparations for what would be a long journey, they made their way first to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. Following their interview with Herod the star reappeared and led them to where Christ was now living. Upon finding Him, He was a "young child" not a "babe" and was now living in a "house." From this and Herod's decree in Matthew 2:16, it seems probable that as much as two years had elapsed since the first appearance of "the star in the East."

The contrast between the wise men's desire to find and worship him "that is born King of the Jews," and the attitude of the Jews themselves is striking. When the wise men came to Jerusalem, "the city of the great King," to make inquiry as to His whereabouts, not only was Herod "troubled," but "all Jerusalem with him" (Matt. 2:3).

Jerusalem, with the wicked Herod on the throne, had no heart for Messiah and cared not to receive Him. And even though they possessed the oracles of God and were able to identify the details of His birthplace, they had no love for Him of whom it all testified.

Their scornful unbelief shows itself even more fully as we read of God's warning to the wise men and Joseph:

"And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (Matt . 2:12,13).

What a picture this presents of the obstinacy and blindness of that favored nation! Because a usurper reigns in Jerusalem, the true King must flee--and to Egypt! While, as it were, the Gentiles cry out to Israel for the blessing God promised through her, Israel is in unbelief and apostasy. Thus Jesus is rejected from the very first.

There is a brighter note and happier theme here, however. The wisdom of the wise men should not be overlooked, for their visit was an event of profound significance.

THE DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCE

Tradition has long held that there were three wise men. It is more probable that the number was much greater and, in any event, their entourage would certainly have been an impressive array. Three has been the traditional number because they brought three gifts. The significance of the gifts, however, is not in identifying the number of the wise men, but in their doctrinal connections. Matthew 2:11 records them thus:

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; GOLD and FRANKINCENSE, and MYRRH."

These three gifts represent the three Messianic offices Christ had come to fill. Gold is for a king, as I Kings 10:10,11,18 quickly illustrates. Frankincense concerns the priesthood (Ex. 30:34-38), while myrrh was an ancient embalming fluid (John 19:39-40) and spoke of the "suffering affliction" of the prophet (Jas. 5:10).

That the Lord Jesus Christ came to be Israel's true Prophet, Priest and King is too clear in Scripture for any to doubt. The gifts of the wise men indicate the depth of their understanding of just who this "newborn king" really was.

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

In light of the above we should not overlook the fact that the homage of the wise men holds foreshadowing which are of tremendous prophetic significance. Certainly their appearance, their diligence in seeking Him out and then, having found Him, their open and glad hearted worship of Him foreshadows the day when the kings of the earth will seek His face and worship Him. Then the age-old predictions will be a reality:

"The kings of Tarshish and of the isles SHALL BRING PRESENTS: the Kings of Sheba and Seba SHALL OFFER GIFTS.

"Yea, ALL KINGS SHALL FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM: all nations shall serve him" (Psa. 72:10,11).

"...all they from Sheba shall come: THEY SHALL BRING GOLD AND INCENSE; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord" (Isa. 60:6).

(Notice the absence of myrrh here. His sufferings over, Messiah will reign as King-Priest in His kingdom Zech.6:12,13).

These are, of course, prophecies about Messiah's coming to establish His kingdom on this earth. Repeatedly this is where the focus of Matthew's record finds itself, for it is Matthew who preeminently presents Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of Israel. Thus, just as Luke's account focuses on the more personal and human aspects, Matthew's pen points onward to the ultimate goal of Messiah's kingdom.

The coming of Christ brought a great opportunity to the nation Israel. Now she was to have Messiah in her midst and hear the glad cry, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" The time was at hand when she was to be the channel of God's blessing to the nations. Hence, the wise men's coming and their finding 'the house" where the Lord was, can but remind the instructed heart of the prophetic prediction:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:2,3).

The wise men's coming with their gifts and homage thus signaled the great opportunity about to be placed before the nation Israel. Their visit also demonstrated the depths of Israel's unbelief.

PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

There is a touching practical lesson taught by these visitors from the east, a lesson concerning God's watchcare over His own and His supply of their every need.

After the wise men departed, Joseph was instructed by the angel of the Lord to "take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt" (2:13). They were to remain there until the death of Herod.

At first glance this seems simple enough, but when we recall the meager financial resources of Joseph and Mary we can only imagine how seemingly impossible such a

journey would have seemed to the murder normal circumstances. But these were by no means "normal circumstances"! Rather, they had just been visited by wealthy men from the east who had presented them with "treasures" of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

(From Luke 2:21-24 it is clear that Mary and Joseph lived on very meager finances for they were forced to offer the "poor man's" sacrifice as per Lev. 12:6-8)

These valuable gifts would amply provide the needed funds to make the long and hurried journey to Egypt and also the means to live in that strange land for some time. How touching to see God use the worship of the wise men to supply these pressing needs!

Faithful believers today can be no less confident of God's supply, for the Apostle clearly say:

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil.4:19).

Although this passage has been much abused by uninstructed and self-centered believers, it is nonetheless a blessed reality.

In time past God promised material blessings and prosperity to His earthly people, Israel, as a reward for their obedience (Deut.28:1-13). Today, in the dispensation of grace, He promises to supply all the needs of each member of the Body of Christ: the supply of our need is "according to His riches in grace by Christ Jesus;" the scope of our blessings today is "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

We are not promised today, that He will shield us from either poverty or pain. (See in the context of Phil. 4:19 the clear testimony of Paul in this regard - e.g., vs11-13) Also :Rom 8:22,2.3; 2 Cor. 4:16,17, etc.) Rather God has given us "all spiritual blessings,"-- every blessing of the Spirit, everything we need to live our lives day by day regardless of circumstances for His glory.

May we, too, dear reader, be "wise men," recognizing who Christ really is, understanding exactly what His ministry and message is and, most of all, resting confidently in Him--in "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

AN INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION

By: Pastor Keith Blades

The question asked by our Lord of the Pharisees in Matthew 22:42 is a question that needs to be asked of those who continue to think like they did. They rejected the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God--God Himself in human flesh in the line of David" that He was anything more than that, especially the Christ, the Son of the living God; that they did not believe.

It is interesting therefore and instructive in view of all the disputes the Lord had with the Pharisees in the years of His ministry, that near the end of His ministry He would take them to task on the very issue of who the Christ is. The question the Lord asked is just as powerful now as it was then:

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

"Saying, WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? WHOSE SON IS HE? They say unto him, The son of David.

"He saith unto them, HOW THEN DOTHTH DAVID IN SPIRIT CALL HIM LORD, saying, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

"IF DAVID THEN CALL HIM LORD, HOW IS HE HIS SON?"

"And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (Matt. 22:41-46).

The inescapable conclusion that the Lord's question and presentation lead to is painfully obvious. The Christ, Israel's Messiah, is the son of David but that is not all that He is. The recognition that He is the son of David only acknowledges His humanity. But the same thing could be said about other men in the line of David. The Christ, however, is more than just the son of David; He is more than just a mere man, and the Lord's comeback question in verses 43 and 44 shows that this is the case.

As Jesus said, "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord?" David called the Christ, his son his Lord. And David did not do this in misguided ignorance, for Jesus clearly declares that David "in spirit " called Him such" David knew something about the Christ that these Pharisees weren't acknowledging and that man will not acknowledge today; and that is that the Christ is the Lord inhuman flesh.

The passage that Jesus refers to is the first verse of the 110th Psalm. That there are two persons in the verse possessing the title "Lord" is obvious. But the two titles are actually different, as the typesetting shows. The first "Lord" is the translation of the name "Jehovah," while the second is the translation of the title "Adonai." David is describing what Jehovah said to his Adonai. But David's Adonai's " David's Lord, is Jehovah.

The only person David ever called "Adonai" is Jehovah God Himself. David understood and appreciated the makeup of the Godhead, and he knew the truth about the plurality of persons in the Godhead. He also understood and appreciated that his Adonai, is Lord, Adonai Jehovah Himself, was going to enflesh himself in the line of David and come into this world as his son. David was not speaking blasphemy in calling his son Lord. He was not irreverently entitling his son with the title "Adonai" which alone is Jehovah's title as Sovereign Lord of all. No, he knew exactly who his son, the Christ, was to be--He was to be his Lord and his God in human flesh of his seed.

Unfortunately even in our day many do not understand what David both understood and expressed by the Holy Spirit concerning the deity of his Messiah almost 1000 years before Jesus Christ walked on this earth. And, amazingly, these folk not only lack this understanding but at time even vehemently deny it--not only in the face of David's testimony, but even in the face of the further evidence of other prophets as well as the doctrinal explanations concerning the person of Jesus Christ in John 1:1-18, Phil.2:5-11, Heb. 1:1-14, Col.2:9, and many others.

What many do today is in actuality no different than what Matthew 22:46 describes the Pharisees doing in response to Jesus' questions: They do not like what the inescapable conclusion is concerning who the persons of the Christ is, they have their own ideas and they are going to stick to them regardless and therefore they simply refuse to deal with the matter out of hardness of heart. But that is not dealing with the revelation of God's Word honestly!

Who Christ is, is not something we are to decide on our own based upon what we think He should be, or what seems to make sense or seems reasonable. Rather we are to understand who Christ is based upon the very criterion Jesus set before the Pharisees--the clear statements of the Word of God. And as Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees, the plain statement of Psalm 110:1 allows only one conclusion: the Christ is not only David's son, but he is also David's Lord, Adonai Jehovah.

USING AND ABUSING CHRISTMAS

If you are one of those who has trouble with much of the pomp and paganism associated with the so-called "Christmas Season," we can certainly sympathize--we feel the same.

While the editor and his family have always drawn the line at the paganism of the season--Christmas trees, Santas, yule logs, etc.--yet at least two things about this season cause our hearts to rejoice:

First, there is much scriptural evidence that the time period associated with December 25 marks the anniversary of one of the most miraculous events in human history. No, Christ was not born on Dec. 25--everyone knows that. The Biblical evidence, however, is great that Dec. 25 marks the real miracle of the incarnation--His conception.

Second, this season offers a tremendous opportunity to get the Word out in an effective way. At a time of receiving-- gifts, what a wonderful opportunity to share with loved ones and friends good Bible study literature.

So, rather than abusing the season, let us use it. First, to rejoice in our great Savior and then to get the wonderful message of His love and grace out to others.
