

Sermon or Lesson: There's A Problem With The Star (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

PROPOSAL: The star of Bethlehem cannot be a natural star or natural phenomenon.

PASSAGE: Matthew 2:1-12

INTRO: Since childhood, most of us have developed a familiarity with the Christmas story account of the three wise men or "Magi" following the star to find the "one who has been born king of the Jews", Jesus in Bethlehem (vv.1-2). Have you ever closely examined the details of this account? If you do, you may notice that there is a major problem with the star!!

CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIORS OF THE STAR:

READ: Matthew 2:1-12

[Lesson Question: List and analyze all of the characteristics and behaviors of the star, as recorded in this Scripture passage.]

SECTION POINT: The star appeared at an exact time, moved south ahead of a group of followers for 7 miles (11.3 kilometers), and then stopped over a specific spot in a specific town.

The recorded facts about the star and the Magi following it:

- - "Magi" - Scholars generally agree that the Magi were men expert in the study of the stars, probably from Persia (Babylon).
 - - The Magi saw His star (v.2) - it was visible at night.
 - - It was distinct and probably significantly brighter than the other stars - it visibly stood out as being unusual to them.
 - - "The exact time the star had appeared" suggests that there was not a convergence of alignment of stars to appear as one bright star, which would take several days or weeks to occur; instead it "appeared" at an "exact time". (v.7)
 - - Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem (v.8), and as they proceed the star "went ahead of them" (v.9) from Jerusalem to about seven miles (11.3 kilometers) to the south to Bethlehem "until it stopped over the place where the child was" (v.9).
 - - The Magi could see the star move and were able to successfully follow it "until" where they could see that "it stopped over the place where the child was". (v.9)
 - - The seven-mile (11.3 kilometers) trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem could be walked in one night; the Magi could and probably did easily accomplish this section of their journey in one night. (v.9)
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PROBLEMS WITH THE STAR:

[Lesson Question: List and analyze all of the problems with the characteristics and behaviors of this star in relation to all known natural phenomena that might correlate to or produce this star.]

SECTION POINT: No natural phenomena exist that can produce the combined characteristics and behaviors of this star, which is acting with intelligence and contrary to the laws of nature.

1. Stars - are burning planets, like our sun.

- Stars do not move south; stars do not move and then stop; and stars do not do this all in one night.

- Stars appear to us on earth as arcing across the night sky; due to their great distance from Earth, they are essentially fixed in space but the rotation of the earth causes us to see them as arcing across our view of the sky as a whole group from the east horizon to the west horizon during the darkness of night, which is approximately twelve hours of visibility; i.e. they all appear to travel from east to west all together every night.

- The stars, being way out in outer space, are too high, so that you cannot tell what specific location on Earth they are over and whether they move seven miles (11.3 kilometers) or not and stop or not - i.e. you can follow them generally, like to the north pole or south pole, but you cannot follow their pointing to a specific location on the surface of the Earth.

- Because our view sees them moving across the sky from east to west, if you follow a positioned star as it comes up from the east horizon and walk a distance towards it as it rises in the east, by the middle of the night it will be straight over head so you stop, and then as daybreak gets closer the star appears to move to the west so you turn around and walk back the same way and distance you came to the place where you started.

[This phenomenon can be demonstrated by walking back and forth in the room you are in, using a flashlight to simulate a star that moves across the ceiling from east to west.]

- By the naked eye, stars that are burning planets like our sun do not appear to move relative to the other stars in one night.

- CONCLUSION: Therefore, this star cannot be a star (or burning planet like our sun) !!

2. Meteors - are chunks of rock.

- Meteors in outer space do not reflect enough light to be visible by the naked eye.

- Meteors that enter the Earth's atmosphere light up from heat friction because they are moving so fast due to being pulled in by the Earth's gravity, but they burn up or crash in a few seconds, making them visibly impossible to follow for any length of time.

- CONCLUSION: Therefore, this star cannot be a meteor.

3. Comets - are dirty ice balls.

- If large enough, comets can be visible in outer space and they do move but they do not stop and they are too high in the sky, i.e. too far out from the surface of the Earth, to be followed to a specific location on the Earth.

- Comets that enter the Earth's atmosphere would disintegrate in a few seconds like meteors do.

- CONCLUSION: Therefore, this star cannot be a comet.

4. The Magi, who study the stars as experts, saw the star appear. If the Bethlehem star was meant only as a sign that a King was being born, then why were they following it as if it was also indicating a specific direction for them to go in order to arrive at a specific location?

- - The Magi successfully followed the star even though following a star in the manner they did is impossible.

- - The Magi were in some way compelled to follow this star, which would be highly unusual for intelligent men who expertly study the stars.

- - CONCLUSION: The Magi observed something about this star that convinced them it was beyond being a normal star and that it was follow-able.

IMPLICATIONS DERIVED FROM THESE FACTS AND CONCLUSIONS:

- - The star of Bethlehem is acting in a way completely contrary to the laws of nature.

- - The star of Bethlehem is acting like a silent helicopter or mythical UFO with a light on it, flying and hovering fairly low in our atmosphere at night. [To demonstrate this, carefully stand on a chair, turn off the lights, and hold a flashlight high, aiming down on the floor.]

- - The star of Bethlehem is exhibiting characteristics of having intelligence directing its active, immediate, and personal movements in conjunction with the Magi's movements.

- - CONCLUSION: The star of Bethlehem cannot be a star or anything else that naturally occurs in outer space or in Earth's atmosphere because it is acting with intelligence and contrary to the laws of nature.

FOUR POSSIBLE ENTITIES:

[Lesson Question: List and analyze all of the supernatural phenomena or entities that might produce the characteristics and behaviors of this star.]

SECTION POINT: The best and most reasonable source or cause of this star is the supernatural activities of God.

There are only 4 possible entities that could produce the combined characteristics and behaviors of this star:

1. Space aliens - There is no material proof of space aliens in the history of mankind or credibility that they exist.

2. Demons - Revelation 12:1-5 records that Satan, the highest ranking among demons, had activities during the time surrounding the birth of Jesus; however Satan's activities certainly would not include drawing worshipping Magi to the child bringing valuable gifts; instead Satan wanted to murder the child through Herod.

3. Angels - Scriptures contain specific and detailed information on the activities of angels during the time surrounding the birth of Jesus, and holy angels are described as being angels of light, but they are not identified as being or causing the star, and a better explanation exists.

4. God - orchestrated a supernatural phenomenon within the Earth's lower atmosphere.

- - Exodus 13:21 - God manifested Himself as a pillar of cloud by day to go “ahead” of the Israelites “to guide them on their way” and a pillar of fire by night “to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night” - “on the way they were to take” (Nehemiah 9:12).
 - - Genesis 1:2 - “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”.
 - - In the theology of the Old Testament, the ‘Shekinah’ is a term used to express the visible divine presence of God, especially when resting between the cherubim over the “atonement cover” or mercy seat of the Ark Of The Covenant in the Tabernacle of Israel. (Unger 1176; Numbers 7:89)
 - - The behavior of the star strongly suggests that this is the presence of God Himself, hovering low in the sky about cloud level, pointing His subtle but distinct light like a beacon or flashlight on what He is doing on the surface of the Earth in the little town of Bethlehem, providing a new way for humans to receive mercy through His Son. [The previous demonstration with the flashlight can be repeated here.]
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BIG IDEA: BEST SOLUTION: The star of Bethlehem was the manifest visible presence of God Himself in the form of a star of light intentionally and intelligently leading the Magi and then hovering over the Son of God, the new mercy seat.

APPLICATIONS:

- - Are you going to actively follow and pursue the supernatural Light of the World, Jesus, whose arrival was so subtly highlighted by the presence of the Father in the form of a star?
 - - Or are you going to ignore or minimize the Light of the World, and naturally pursue your own direction for your life, oblivious to the direct steps God took 2,000 years ago to redeem and save those who see and respond in faith?
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