
In the East

Bible Reading: Matthew 2.1-12

Peter J Blackburn

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In the East takes us to Babylon where Nemzi and Padri have arrived for the weekly meeting of the Babylonian Magi Association. What was “the star of Bethlehem”? This drama assumes the proposal of some scholars that it was in fact a conjunction of three planets calculated as having occurred around that time and recurring over a two-year period. It would have been in that part of the sky designated “the house of the Hebrews” by the astrologers. There was an important Jewish community in Babylon.

In the East

Somewhere to the east of Jerusalem, possibly in Babylon, were a group of men who studied the stars. They were magi and looked for signs which might give clues to the meaning of human life and history. It was the weekly meeting of the Babylonian Magi Association...

NEMZI: Beautiful clear night, tonight, Padri.

PADRI: Yes. Last night was too. I was having a good look at that strange star that Balshai has been so excited about.

NEMZI: And what do you think?

PADRI: I guess it **is** rather special. I haven't been following that part of the heavens the way Balshai has. I believe it is a rather unusual conjunction of three of the planets – they're all sort of lined up at the moment.

NEMZI: I've been doing some checking up on that other idea of his. Remember how he said this star was in the part of the sky we call "the house of the Hebrews"?

PADRI: I checked that out last night, and he's quite right there!

NEMZI: I've been talking to the ruler of the Jewish synagogue about it.

PADRI: Come up with anything special?

NEMZI: Well, listen to this, "A star will arise in Jacob..."

PADRI: Where'd you get that?

NEMZI: The ruler of the synagogue kindly allowed me to copy it down from their Scriptures!

PADRI: Very striking! But what does it mean?

NEMZI: The Jews apparently believe (and have done for centuries) – they believe their God will send someone special into the world. They are waiting for a Messiah – that's a Hebrew word meaning "anointed".

PADRI: In lots of countries, oil is used to set people apart.

NEMZI: Yes – like that – they've done that, too. But they call this one **the** Messiah – you know, something unique about him.

PADRI: So Balshai was really onto something! We're going to have an interesting meeting when he comes!

NEMZI: Apparently Malkai checked these things at the synagogue after last week's meeting. I know he was going over to Balshai's place to talk more about it. His eyes sort of lit up when Balshai spoke.

PADRI: Yes, Nezzar was like that, too. I think he and Balshai have been star-watching together a lot lately.

NEMZI: Personally, I think we have to be careful not to go overboard about these things!

PADRI: I agree. Now... It's time the other chaps turned up. We can't start without them.

NEMZI: Hey, is that a note on the table?

PADRI: I think it might be. Let's see... It's from Balshai...

NEMZI: Come on, what does he say?

PADRI: He simply says, "Malkai, Nezzar and I are setting out on... (let's see, that's yesterday)... We are quite convinced the King of the Jews has been born and we are going to worship him." ... Incredible!

NEMZI: Insane, I'd say! That's easily a month's travel each way. I think they're taking things a bit far!

PADRI: I wonder!

Meanwhile, one day's travel to the west, Balshai, Malkai and Nezzar were still on the road. Their plan was to get some rest during the day, so they could travel right through the night.

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